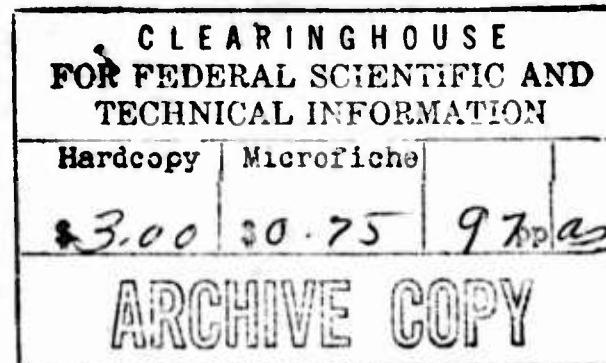


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MEMORANDUM
RM-4544-PR
JUNE 1965



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ESCALATION AND THE NUCLEAR OPTION

Bernard Brodie

PREPARED FOR:

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE PROJECT RAND

The RAND Corporation
SANTA MONICA • CALIFORNIA

MEMORANDUM

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Bernard Brodie

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PREFACE

The following Memorandum represents a tentative effort to introduce some fresh thoughts into the discussion of escalation and its relation to the use of tactical nuclear weapons. The study stresses the importance, in making any choice of strategies, including the decision to use or refrain from using nuclear weapons, of gauging the intent behind the opponent's military moves. For the grosser but nevertheless important distinctions -- like that between a probe or a determined aggression -- such assessment should not be difficult. The study also suggests that the use or threat of use of tactical nuclear weapons may often be counterescalatory, that is, may check rather than promote the expansion of hostilities. The last section of the study applies to several imagined situations the ideas about escalation that have been explored in earlier sections.

Believing that the topic of escalation needs more systematic study than it has yet received, the author hopes to develop a larger and more comprehensive analysis of the same group of problems, and to include in the resulting study an intensive survey of the literature in the field.

The present Memorandum is a contribution to RAND's continuing program of research, undertaken for the U.S. Air Force, concerning strategic concepts.

Author's Acknowledgments

In preparing this paper I have received valuable critical comments from the following: H. A. DeWeerd, H. S. Dinerstein, A. Frye, P. Y. Hammond, A. L. Horelick,

F. C. Ikle, V. G. Jackson, W. Jones, R. Kolkowicz,
M. Lavin, N. Leites, R. A. Levine, T. M. Parker,
B. L. R. Smith, K. C. Strother, and T. W. Wolfe.

SUMMARY

The Berlin blockade of 1948-1949 and the subsequent probes of 1958 and 1961 attest the Soviet reluctance to push too hard. The Cuban crisis of 1962 showed Moscow backing down in haste when resolutely confronted. Clearly the Soviets are as keenly alive as we are to the catastrophic nature of general war. It is difficult to imagine what purposes would induce them to assume the risks of mounting a major offensive against Europe.

An accidental war is not impossible, but neither is it as probable as some suppose. Assuming that an accidental outbreak of conflict can usually be distinguished from a deliberate attack -- which is an entirely reasonable assumption -- this should encourage us to lower our estimates of the chances of uncontrolled escalation. We should be ready, in advance, to adopt against a deliberate attack a kind of response radically different from what we would consider appropriate for a conflict growing out of a mischance.

If general war does occur, it will come through the escalation of lesser conflicts over issues that are isolated and regional. We are now committed to meeting local action at the local level, at least initially. It is an awareness of these circumstances, especially the changes that have occurred in the strategic environment during the past ten years, that has focused attention on the problem of escalation and, in particular, on what is commonly believed to encourage it -- the use of nuclear weapons at the tactical level. The nuclear "stalemate" exists only in a strategic, not a tactical, sense.

Controlling escalation is really an exercise in deterrence, which means providing effective disincentives to unwanted enemy actions. Contrary to widely endorsed opinion, the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons in tactical operations seems at least as likely to check as to promote the expansion of hostilities. The important proviso here is that the decision to use nuclears must be related to what appear to be the enemy's intentions compounded of his hopes and fears, and not just his capabilities. It should not come automatically as the result of some barrier crossed or some other mechanistic consideration.

It is the neglect of enemy intentions and the emphasis on such mechanistic considerations that mark the "fire-break" theory. Those who support it believe that the only practicable way of preventing escalation is by strict observance of the distinction between nuclear and non-nuclear weapons. Accordingly, they call for a rather large buildup of conventional forces, especially in Europe, and a willingness to confine ourselves to their use even up to high levels of violence in order to avoid resort to nuclear arms. Aside from the inherent risk that would arise from allowing violence to mount, the theory, in order to work, requires the cooperation of the enemy. He must believe in it too. Thus far, fortunately for us, the Soviets have seemed to regard fighting us with any sort of weapon as extremely dangerous.

If deterrence fails and we find ourselves in open hostilities, the Soviet (or Communist Chinese) will to escalate must depend enormously on our own behavior. That behavior should be guided if not governed by the knowledge,

for which we have strong evidence, that they fully understand the marked disadvantage to them of escalating up to or beyond minimum nuclear levels. In other words, our increasing superiority as conflict escalates does and should matter. Avoidance of nuclear (or other) blackmail can be achieved only by demonstrating that our readiness to accept risks need not be and is not less than the blackmailer's.

We must incidentally also persuade our European allies that the enemy can be at least as well deterred by effective local defense forces armed with nuclear weapons as by threats of strategic retaliation. But in any case we must be aware of the existence of reasonable limits to the utility of projecting abroad our fear of using nuclear weapons. To go beyond these limits is to adopt a psychology that manifestly neutralizes our enormously superior nuclear capabilities.

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I. ESCALATORY FEARS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF LOCAL RESISTANCE

In principle, general nuclear war between the Soviet Union and the United States can start either full-blown -- which is to say by direct surprise attack by one side upon the other, either from a condition of peace or after just enough hostilities to activate the "tripwire" -- or by escalation from lesser conflicts. Not long ago it was only the sudden surprise onset that was considered a real possibility. The need to strike first in a strategic exchange was too overwhelming to permit delay. In recent years, however, the conviction has spread and deepened that in the future, general war can hardly occur except through escalation from lesser conflicts.

What has happened is that the disincentives for strategic nuclear attack at any time, including a time of fairly intense local hostilities, have become great and also obvious, especially for the side that sees its opponent in something like the superior strength with which the Russians must view us. The chief and almost the sole incentive for moving fast in such an attack in the past, which was to destroy the enemy's retaliatory force before it left the ground, has in the last several years been sharply declining as a compelling operative constraint.

It is not essential to the analysis which is to follow to establish just how complete are our present and future guarantees against surprise strategic attack. However, it is relevant that the chances of such attack appear on the

whole very small, and that the great reduction in our fears of it is based on good reasons and not on mere wishful thinking. The basic physical reason is the enormous and continuing improvement in the security of our retaliatory forces (and presumably also the enemy's) against attack through the well-known devices of hardening, concealment, and mobility. This improvement may indeed be threatened in the future by certain technological advances, but it need not be overturned if we remain fully abreast of ongoing developments.

Our confidence is further increased by the fact that this physical change has served to buttress a comparably profound psychological change. The latter results from a greatly improved understanding, apparently on the Soviet Russian side as well as our own, of the motivations and psychology of the opponent. The reasons for this improvement in mutual insight are many, but the essential fact is that each side seems to have scaled down substantially the degree of aggressiveness, recklessness, or callousness it formerly attributed to the other -- besides which both have now grown accustomed to living with each other under a situation that once seemed intolerably menacing. Stability does not thrive on illusion, but it does help enormously to have the situation turn other than precarious.

This basic change in the world's political and strategic environment, which has taken place mostly during the last decade and which was both demonstrated and advanced by the outcome of the Cuban missile crisis of 1962,¹ is no

¹ Whatever else we may say about that crisis, it is clear from its outcome that the Russians never thought they

doubt in the net a considerable gain for everybody. It is not without its price, some would argue a serious price. Although the threat of massive retaliation has long been discounted by strategic analysts as being inappropriate for coping with relatively small-scale aggressions or infractions by the opponent, it did seem not so long ago to be a valid means of dealing with possible aggressions that might be deliberate and massive though still local, either in Europe or in Asia.

The famous speech by the late Secretary John Foster Dulles of January 12, 1954, in which he did not invent but merely reasserted the threat of retaliating "massively," was largely a warning to the Chinese not to risk a resumption of the Korean War. As such, it was not at all unbelievable. Moreover, almost no one at that time doubted -- surely the Russians did not doubt -- that a deliberate Soviet attack against Western Europe (which everyone took for granted would inevitably be massive) would be met with an immediate American strategic nuclear attack against the Soviet Union.

The time for relying mainly on such strategies or rather threats is clearly past. Whether or not credibility would have survived for some time longer in the world outside if

were actually risking war by putting the missiles into Cuba. Certainly they removed them with alacrity as soon as President Kennedy made clear his readiness to back his warnings with use of force, and in doing so they took no pains at all to hide their great aversion for any hostilities with us, however limited. See A. L. Horelick, The Cuban Missile Crisis: An Analysis of Soviet Calculations and Behavior, The RAND Corporation, RM-3779-PR, September 1963; also published, in slightly abbreviated form, in World Politics, Vol. 10, No. 3, April 1964, pp. 363-389.

we had continued to insist upon it as the strategy to which we were wholeheartedly committed is no longer at issue. The dominant fact is that U.S. official pronouncements have for some time been committing us to the principle that local aggressions on the part of our major opponents must at least initially be resisted locally. The possibility of further escalation will, to be sure, be unavoidably but also usefully present. It will tend to induce caution on both sides, but it will more especially tend to dissuade the aggressor from testing very far the efficacy of a resolute local defense.²

In short, vis-à-vis the Soviet Union we can no longer effectively threaten general war as an initial response to anything other than a direct strategic attack upon us. However, our strategic nuclear capabilities cannot fail to play an important role in any serious crisis. What we can and no doubt will threaten in such an instance will be some move or action which, so long as it spells violence, could escalate. We have to leave to the opponent in his next move the choice of making the situation more dangerous or less so, though we can of course massively influence the choice he will make.

The present relevance of all this is partly that in the strategic dialogue that is always proceeding within NATO, publicly and otherwise, we are in some danger of missing the special character of certain recent European complaints. One of our replies to the alarm which some of our allies have expressed over our earlier preoccupation

² The asymmetry suggested here between attacker and defender will be clarified in Section VI below; see especially pp. 43-46.

with conventional forces has taken the form of stressing the rapid growth of our store of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, coupled with renewed affirmation that they would be used if necessary. From the French especially the response has been that our willingness to use tactical nuclear weapons does not reassure them. The French premier, M. Georges Pompidou, echoing President de Gaulle, has declared that such use would make Europe the scorched battleground and leave the United States untouched. This is not a new argument, to be sure, but we had rather lost sight of it. Worse still, the people who think this way equate American unwillingness to initiate and thus undergo strategic bombing with an unwillingness or an inability to defend them. Our open national response to such charges has been in general to express shock that our intentions and good faith have been questioned, and then to fall back on ambiguities concerning those intentions.

Where Europeans insist that we will surely be unwilling to hazard national extermination for them, it is useless to try to persuade them that we will indeed be ready to do so. We should rather emphasize the fact -- which is to their decided advantage -- that there is no need for us to initiate (and thus to undergo) strategic bombing in order to defend them effectively. The threat of an effective local defense -- which is to say one that is serious enough either to succeed in itself or to open up the possibilities for larger scale action -- is a deterrent as good as or better than any threat of general war, especially since it is far less subject to being doubted.

We could remind the French that in 1917 and again in 1941 our European allies did not resent or reject our

military support of them on the ground that we could not for obvious geographical reasons share fully their anguish and their vital danger. History and geography had put the enemy on their borders, not on ours. The idea that Europe can and should be defended in Europe, at least to begin with, can hardly be bizarre, novel, or abhorrent to the Europeans -- provided it is confronted honestly.³ Naturally the Europeans don't want to be the battleground for our own quarrels with the Russians, but that means only that our main job of persuasion is to convince the Europeans that we will never fight the Russians in Europe except in the direct defense of Europe.

Anyway, to return to our main theme: when looked at whole, the situation today is without doubt enormously preferable to that which faced us formerly. Then we not only had to be prepared against surprise attack -- we still do, in order to keep its probability low -- but also feared it as something which, we thought, had a much more than trivial chance of happening in our lifetime.

The present situation is often spoken of as the "nuclear stalemate." It is a valid enough characterization if we

³ It should be noted in passing that it is not this aspect of NATO that de Gaulle finds mainly objectionable. His preferences seem to be for a looser alliance than the present one, presumably because he finds the American influence in the present one too overbearing. He may conceivably believe that a looser alliance means inevitably a lesser commitment to local defense, and thus possibly a larger likelihood of U.S. strategic commitment, but he is surely too realistic to entertain so circuitous a conviction. Certainly a looser commitment all round is not going to make us more likely to initiate nuclear general war.

are clear that it does not make superiority meaningless,⁴ and provided we remember that the "stalemate" applies properly only to a strategic exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union. The latter point has to be stressed because the term is often indiscriminately applied, especially by laymen, to any use of nuclear weapons. As we shall have occasion to develop later, the existence of a nuclear stalemate on the strategic level may indeed favor rather than prohibit the use of nuclear weapons on the tactical level.

The very easement of the danger of surprise strategic attack has stimulated a special fear of what in quite recent times has come to be called escalation.⁵ The fact that it seems to be the only way, or at any rate much the

⁴ The superiority can be found to be meaningful according to a number of criteria, but probably the most important is that it interposes some degree of differential between the opponents in their willingness to escalate -- a differential which is naturally subject to other influences as well.

⁵ The word "escalation" is relatively new to military usage, and its meanings and connotations are still very much in flux. While in some uses the word connotes a deliberately chosen rather than a forced course of action -- i.e., a decision on the part of one of the contenders during combat to shift to a higher level of violence -- in another and more common use it refers to something which, while reflecting the willful acts of men, lies essentially beyond anyone's deliberate will. To put it another way, deliberate acts of escalation which are quickly reciprocated in kind produce "uncontrolled" escalation which both sides presumably abhor. There are other ambiguities about the term, especially in relation to the question: escalation to what? Originally the word tended to mean a shift from limited to general war, but increasingly it has come to signify any growth in the dimensions of a conflict.

least unlikely way, in which general war can occur helps to focus attention on it. Previously one took for granted -- as the Soviet political and military leaders apparently still do -- that any outbreak of unambiguous hostilities between the Soviet Union and the United States would escalate almost immediately to general war. We therefore concentrated our concern on avoiding the outbreak of war, rather than on the escalation that we feared must surely follow such an outbreak. However, as soon as people sensed the possibility that we could have a war even with the Soviet Union that might stay limited, then escalation, which is to say the erosion or collapse of limitations, became quite appropriately the object of special attention. It was natural, even if not altogether logical, that concentration on avoiding escalation should tend among specialists to displace in importance the object of avoiding the outbreak of war.

We must be prepared also for a somewhat comparable displacement of attention with respect to the tactical use of nuclear weapons. It was not until sophisticated persons began to discern the possibility, through restraint in fighting, of avoiding the worst imaginable kind of holocaust, which is to say unlimited war, that the abhorrence that most civilized people feel towards nuclear weapons tended to be focused on the tactical use of such weapons in limited war.⁶ The intense desire to avoid any

⁶ It is worth recording that the process here described took considerable time. Ideas concerning modern limited war had been bruited about in the United States for some years, and were greeted with skepticism enough, before the additionally novel thought began to be suggested that

use of nuclear weapons quite naturally provoked the allegation that use of them in limited war would be critical in tripping off uncontrolled escalation.

It may be desirable for other reasons to avoid any use of nuclear weapons, and it may also be true that resort to such weapons is the critical factor in provoking uncontrolled escalation (obviously, introduction of nuclear weapons is itself an important kind of escalation); but the two points are distinct, and evidence to support the latter contention does not flow inevitably from that marshalled to support the former. The reverse may in fact be the case; a weapon which is feared and abhorred is so much the less likely to be used automatically in response to any kind of signal, including even the enemy's use of it.

It is, however, obvious that views attributing a powerful and automatic escalatory stimulus to nuclear weapons -- views which are no less firmly advanced for being based entirely on intuition -- have been critical in determining attitudes towards appropriate strategies in the event of limited war, especially in any conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union or China. Naturally, they have thereby greatly affected force postures, recommended and realized, for ourselves and

limited wars, even fairly large ones, could and ought to be fought by conventional means alone. Thus, those relevant ideas that seem to many today to be utterly self-evident were manifestly not so to most strategic thinkers in the middle and late fifties. See Morton Halperin, Limited War: An Essay on the Development of the Theory and an Annotated Bibliography, Harvard University, Center for International Affairs, Occasional Paper No. 3, May 1962.

for our allies. The ramifications of these attitudes, and the disagreements they engender, affect the whole gamut of national defense policies.

II. THE METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEM

We should make clear at the outset that there appear to be no special tools, devices, or gimmicks by which we may drastically improve our predictions concerning the chances of escalation in any crisis. There seems to be no substitute for old-fashioned analysis, applied with special discipline to the problem that concerns us. What we are looking for are relevant generalizations in which we can have high confidence and which will importantly assist us to estimate the risks of escalation in the event of any confrontation between the United States and either of our major opponents, especially over the near-term (i.e., about ten years).⁷ In pursuing these we will no doubt find in our way some existing operationally-entrenched generalizations that are based on intuited assumptions on which widespread consensus exists but which have rarely if ever been critically examined.

We are dealing in this pursuit with issues of human behavior under great emotional stress in circumstances that have never been experienced. Use of such techniques as war or crisis gaming helps importantly to enlarge the perspectives of the players and to make them more comprehensive in their thinking, but it does not provide them, or those who read their reports, with answers to the crucial questions. Experienced persons agree that one simply cannot reproduce in a gaming environment among the players the kind and degree of emotional tension and feeling of

⁷ We specify the near-term to allow for basic changes in conditions and because, insofar as new analysis is needed, the future can take care of itself.

high responsibility bound to be present among decision-makers in real life crises in the nuclear era, where decisions have to be made whether and by what means to fight a war. Penalties of the required magnitude for erroneous moves are quite absent; the appropriate degree of fear or dread on both sides, no doubt mixed with feelings of anger or hostility, are thus only dimly imagined.

That does not mean that players always act more boldly in games than the same persons might in comparable decision-making positions in a real crisis;⁸ it means only that their reasons for acting either timidly or boldly have almost always been formed independently of the game environment. The players are usually expressing by their moves their respective conceptions or understanding of how leaders in the real world operate under comparable situations, e.g., their conceptions of when considerations of prestige dominate over fear, or vice versa. The degree of political and psychological sophistication represented in the process may be considerable or it may not, and whether it is or not is certainly more important than the elegance or complexity of the game.

Certainly this is no criticism of gaming. In some kinds of inquiries we cannot really cope with our problems

⁸ One of the important constraints in gaming is the desire to avoid appearing wildly illogical in the eyes of one's colleagues. Such constraints, while providing useful discipline, obviously depend on the correctness of the consensus on what constitutes "wildly illogical behavior." In trying to clear away ancient error, consensus is always our greatest enemy.

by any other means. It suggests only that for present purposes the improvement of the players' "conceptions and understandings" is much more essential to our ends than the use of the game technique itself, which can, however, become usefully supplemental.

We shall have to consider first in some breadth and depth those factors which bear importantly upon the relevant decisions that national leaders will make in anticipation of an outbreak of fighting, and also during the early stages of such fighting. We shall try to imagine various crisis situations from which one conceives hostilities breaking out, asking at each critical point in the imagined sequence of events (thus preserving something of the game technique) what would be the likely constraints upon each side and the various options open to it, or rather, how at the time would they be likely to appear to each side. What are likely to be the emotions as well as the strategic and political considerations guiding the responsible leaders, and how are those emotions likely to affect their perception of the situation? We should thereby be attempting to clarify just how and by what steps local and limited war could develop into a general war. We should also be asking and attempting to answer questions like the following: What conditions would in general favor unwanted escalation? What would cause the existence of such conditions? What could we prudently do in advance to modify or eliminate them?

In such an exercise we should have to bring intimately into play our knowledge of our two major Communist opponents, especially the Soviet Union. That knowledge is today, among the appropriate experts, quite considerable,

being based on continuing intensive analysis of a very large body of data, including that derived from our own fairly prolonged, crisis-laden national experience with the Russians. Concerning the Chinese, about whom we have less knowledge but still a significant and most useful amount, it would seem to be obvious that in any fighting with them over the next ten years we really ought not to have to worry over-much about escalation that reached or threatened to reach the use of nuclear weapons -- unless the Soviet Union supported them to the hilt -- because their nuclear capabilities, either tactical or strategic, will obviously bear no comparison to ours. We could, to be sure, allow ourselves to be paralyzed by anxiety about what the Chinese could do with just a few bombs and delivery vehicles, e.g., bomb Tokyo. It is something to consider, but, hopefully, not through forsaking entirely any reasonable perspective. We seem to find it easy to write off the French nuclear effort (when considered independently) as relatively useless, and the French effort is likely to be for some time by orders of magnitude more impressive than the Chinese.

III. THE RELEVANT IMAGE OF THE OPPONENT

It is necessary now to mention some relevant facts about our opponents, especially the Soviet leaders. Estimating probabilities of escalation is essentially an exercise in predicting the behavior of those leaders (as well as our own) under various kinds of crisis situations. The areas of uncertainty may be broad enough, but we are not dealing with mysterious and unknown elements. There is, among other things, a copious record that can usefully be looked at.

The first point to notice is that the political leaders of the Soviet Union appear today to believe quite as deeply as our own in the utterly catastrophic nature of general nuclear war. Whatever differences there are between the two governments in respective degrees of conviction are very likely too marginal to be politically significant. Besides, if there were real shortcomings in the Soviet attitude in this respect, they would surely be compensated for by Soviet awareness of present gross inferiority in the relevant weapons.

Soviet feelings about nuclear war are abundantly manifest in Soviet utterances as well as behavior, including the recent bitter dialogue between Peking and Moscow. And incidentally, when Moscow charged Peking with not being sufficiently aware of the terrible hazards of general nuclear war, Peking replied not by challenging the Soviet view but by denying that it had been insensitive to those hazards!⁹

⁹See the "Chinese Government Statement" of 1 September 1963, reprinted in English translation, in Survival,

In a speech in Hungary during the spring of 1964, the former Soviet premier, Khrushchev, remarked: "Only a child or an idiot does not fear war." Later, on signing the "friendship pact" with the East Germans in June 1964, he declared: "Nuclear war is stupid, stupid, stupid! If you reach for the push button you reach for suicide." These remarks prove nothing in themselves, but they do reflect what we know from other indices is a quite different world from that existing before 1939, let alone before 1914. Nor is there any indication that Khrushchev's successors, Brezhnev and Kosygin, differ significantly from him in these respects.

The second point is that when the record of the Soviet Union since the end of World War II is examined carefully, there emerges an image of a government that combines in a quite unprecedented manner (a) political aggressiveness and an itch for probing with (b) extreme military caution. The Russians have been most respectful of our strength, and prudent. That does not in itself mean that they cannot change in the future and become militarily aggressive, but we should be clear that it would have to be a change, and a profound one. Moreover, since October 1962 the trends seem to have been entirely in the opposite direction.

The evidence for the above statements is quickly outlined. Perhaps the most conspicuous instance since World War II of what we usually think of as Soviet aggressiveness was the so-called Berlin blockade of 1948-49. In

November-December 1963, Vol. 5, No. 6, pp. 263-268.
See also Alice Langley Hsieh, "The Sino-Soviet Nuclear Dialogue: 1963," The RAND Corporation, P-2852, January 1964.

retrospect it is difficult to find evidence of anything like an unambiguous threat of force by the Soviet leaders to deny us ground access to Berlin. On the contrary, the measures that finally induced us to resort to the airlift at the end of June 1948 were instituted gradually over a three-month period -- though the most serious of them were concentrated in the final two weeks. We may be sure that each measure was imposed tentatively for the purpose of observing our response.¹⁰ As General Lucius D. Clay was later to write:

The care with which the Russians avoided measures which would have been resisted with force had convinced me that the Soviet Government did not want war although it believed that the Western Allies would yield much of their position rather than risk war. . . . I reported this conviction . . . suggesting that we advise the Soviet representatives in Germany that under our rights to be in Berlin we proposed on a specific date to move an armed convoy which would be equipped with the engineering material to overcome the technical difficulties which the Soviet representatives appeared unable to solve. . . .

In my view the chances of such a convoy being met by force with subsequent developments of hostilities were small. I was confident that it would get through to Berlin

¹⁰ See Jean Edward Smith, The Defense of Berlin, Baltimore, 1963, pp. 103-130; also Philip Windsor, City on Leave, London, 1963, pp. 98-126. Neither author quite makes the points I am making here, but they provide the data for them. See also W. Phillips Davison, The Berlin Blockade: A Study in Cold War Politics, Princeton, N. J., 1958, especially pp. 98ff.

and that the highway blockade would be ended. . . .¹¹

What is perhaps most telling is that even after we had underlined our own pacific intentions (or anxieties) by accepting the presumed denial of ground access, the Russians made not the slightest attempt to interfere with our only alternative means of access, the airlift -- as they could easily have done, for example, by jamming our ground-controlled-approach radar. Because of the many days of marginal flying conditions in Berlin, especially through the long winter, such jamming would have interfered seriously with the success of the airlift. This hardly suggests the temper of a blockade. No doubt the Russians desired us to interpret their actions as a blockade, but only so long as we were not ready to test our interpretation with force.

¹¹ From his Decision in Germany, New York, 1950, p. 374, quoted in Smith, op. cit., p. 117. Mr. Robert Murphy, in his recently published Diplomat Among Warriors, New York, 1964, has indicated that he thought of resigning over the issue of our accepting the presumed denial of access on the ground and he now regrets that he did not do so. See pp. 313-323. The Mayor of West Berlin, Ernst Reuter, an ex-Communist who knew the Russians well, was convinced that the Soviets were bluffing and that they would lift the "blockade" immediately if an armored column pushed up the highway from Helmstedt. Among others who had the same conviction was the left-wing British Labour Party leader, Aneurin Bevan. On the basis of our present knowledge, it appears practically certain that the appraisal shared by Clay, Murphy, Reuter, and Bevan was correct. Such a conclusion, however, does not seriously impugn the judgment of those who thought otherwise at the time; we are after all speaking with the benefit of considerable hindsight.

The two Berlin "crises" of 1958 and 1961 were erected in each case simply on a Russian threat, with a declared deadline, to sign a separate peace treaty with the East Germans. Though we were obliged to regard such a threat seriously because of certain implications, in neither case was there any direct threat of use of force to deny us access. In each case, moreover, the deadline was allowed to drift by without the threatened action. No doubt the vigor of our response was responsible for the Soviet backtracking. But it is at least questionable whether our response in the latter case needed to go as far as calling up large numbers of reserves and substantially reinforcing our air forces in Europe.

Finally we come to the Cuban crisis of October 1962. The fact that the Russians put offensive missiles and bombers into Cuba has often since been urged as proof of both their unpredictability and their aggressiveness. It is no doubt a salutary reminder that our expectations may go awry. However, in estimating the Soviet purpose, one cannot permit any such arbitrary divorce from that phase of the operation from the concluding phase. The same leader responsible for putting the missiles in took them right out again, hastily and even ignominiously, when he saw that the United States was ready to back up with force its demands for their removal. The circumstances of that removal must surely modify one's estimate of his boldness in putting the missiles in. Khrushchev may have been foolish, but was he really being foolhardy?

A question often asked after the event and as often speculatively answered was: What was the Soviet purpose in putting in the missiles? Rarely asked but more urgent

for future guidance is the question: What did we do to make them think we would let them get away with it? Obviously, their thinking so was critical to the whole operation. Our behavior in the Bay of Pigs episode and thereafter apparently led the Russians to expect that, despite our words to the contrary, we would accept the missiles and bombers in Cuba as we had accepted the earlier phases of their military buildup. And one Soviet expectation was indeed fulfilled -- that if they had to retreat they would be permitted to do so, i.e., that upon discovery of the missiles in Cuba we would not initiate hostilities without further warning. This expectation being both reasonable and correct, the actual risks they were taking were certainly manageable. Can one say, then, that our previous knowledge of the Russians, accumulated over a whole generation of intense scholarship, was put to naught? Deepened that knowledge certainly was, but the key lessons concerned our own errors. Our having made a bad prediction does not justify our calling the Russians "unpredictable."

Another extremely significant aspect of that crisis is that Soviet behavior during it and afterward was conspicuously more cooperative also concerning Berlin. This behavior ran directly contrary to the expectations of our own and allied leaders following President Kennedy's October 22 speech.¹² Certainly this demonstration, unique

¹² One British Foreign Office official informed this writer that when the President's speech was heard in the United Kingdom, "the Foreign Office, to a man, expected the Russians to be in West Berlin on the following day." It is worthwhile considering: Why were they so wrong?

in the postwar world, of our readiness to use force directly against Soviet-manned installations, and to oppose an action that did not even involve a violation of frontiers, must have come as a great shock to the Soviet leaders. Obviously it was a salutary one.

The above episodes largely sum up the record, overwhelmingly negative, of Soviet military initiative along the whole of that long line of demarcation on which the NATO Powers have confronted the Soviet power since the end of World War II. In those twenty years there has been no infringement of frontiers and not the slightest skirmish between their troops and ours. Some of our planes have fallen to their fire, but always under circumstances where the Russians could at least claim we were overflying their territory. Besides, the record long ago established that such attacks do not bring reprisals. Contrary to U.S. expectations of ten years ago or more, the Russians have shown themselves relatively careful to avoid making unauthorized flights over our territories.¹³

It is against this record that we must consider the scenarios usually produced in support of pleas for basically altering our defense posture in Europe. That an image of the Soviet Union which inflates Soviet military aggressiveness should be used to justify the need for more

¹³ One early objection to the D.E.W. line across central Canada was that the Russians could and would spoof it to death. So far as is publicly known, they have not attempted to spoof it at all. They have, of course, behaved very differently with U.S. Navy ships at sea, taking full and often annoying advantage, with both air and surface craft, of the fact that the sea is an international common.

conventional forces would once have looked paradoxical, but we have gotten used to the paradox. In any case, the contrary image of a Soviet Union that has been (and presumably still can be) completely deterred from any aggressive military action by something like our present military posture in Europe hardly presents a good case for costly conventional buildup. The two ingredients necessary to justify that buildup are thus (a) Soviet alleged military aggressiveness, expressed in (b) imputed readiness to assault our nuclear-armed forces with conventional arms alone. Such conduct would be not only unprecedented but also fantastically "adventuristic," a trait to which Russian Communism has long been known to be peculiarly inhospitable.

However, the dubious plausibility of such scenarios has been sufficiently exposed to cause a shift in the emphasis in recent years to the possibility of "accidental" war. The various concepts of accidental war tend to have in common a condition, following some initiating event, in which both sides find themselves engaged in hostilities which neither side wants -- in fact which both sides may have been desperately anxious to avoid. The variety of ways in which such a circumstance is supposed to come about include mainly (a) "miscalculation," usually in the form of a probing action by the Soviet Union which has escalated but which was originally prompted by the erroneous assumption that the West would not resist at all, or would make only token resistance, or (b) some "unauthorized actions" by the military personnel of one side against the other which lead to (perhaps also unauthorized) local retaliation.

It is actually quite difficult to find historical examples of "accidental war" which fit easily either of these patterns. Political leaders have sometimes underestimated the resolve of a potential opponent to react violently against some planned aggressive action, as Hitler underestimated in 1939 the determination of the British and French governments to go to war with him because of his conquest of Poland, or as General Douglas MacArthur and the Truman administration underestimated the readiness of the Communist Chinese to intervene in the Korean War as the UN forces approached the Yalu. No doubt also the original North Korean attack was launched in the confident expectation that the words of certain American leaders meant that the United States would not intervene. However, the actions that elicited these unexpected responses were a good deal more than "probing actions," a terminology which implies the opportunity and capacity to withdraw the probe. Though in each case mentioned we have to admit "miscalculation," it would be stretching the term a good deal to call any of the ensuing wars "accidental." Hitler would clearly have invaded Poland anyway, and in the other examples cited the party launching the aggression was clearly willing to accept substantial risks. Despite the unexpected but certainly not unthinkable Chinese intervention, the most surprising thing about the Korean War -- something that would not have been predicted at all before the event -- was the degree to which escalation was in fact controlled and stopped.

So far as concerns the statesmen's perennial nightmare of "unauthorized action" by military personnel, one

has to observe that military officers are intensively trained above all to obey the orders of legally authorized superiors, especially in the kind of established and well-ordered states that we are usually thinking of when we talk of the possibility of nuclear war among the powers. Revolts like that of the four French generals in Algeria in the spring of 1961, which incidentally did not involve an attack on another power, are exceedingly rare in the history of France or of other European countries. In this instance the circumstances were of a very special nature; even so, the revolt quickly collapsed because of the unwillingness of the great majority of French officers in Algeria to countenance mutiny and, for that matter, because of the basically nonmutinous dispositions of the chief actors themselves.

So far as the American and the Soviet military forces are concerned, the tradition in each case of complete and dedicated subordination by the military to civilian authority reveals hardly any impairment historically. The insubordination that President Truman charged against General MacArthur concerned activity of a political rather than military nature, involving mainly unauthorized letters and statements to the press. Anyway, no one challenged the President's authority to remove the prestigious MacArthur. Historically it is no problem to find many instances of conspicuous restraint on the part of the military, and very difficult to find the reverse. One thinks of General Beauregard wiring Montgomery for a reconfirmation of his orders before opening fire on Fort Sumpter, or, on the British side, Admiral Milne in the Mediterranean tracking the Breslau and the Goeben on August 4, 1914, waiting for

his government's ultimatum to expire at midnight before opening fire -- thereby losing his chance altogether.

We also know enough in detail about the Soviet armed forces since the Revolution to have more than the usual confidence that the Soviet military leaders are accustomed to obeying the leaders of the party and the government. The services that permitted thousands of their officers, including those of the very highest rank, to be murdered by the dictator in the purge of the late 'thirties without the slightest move of opposition, and which in war and peace have tolerated a degree of intrusion by the "political commissar" that a western officer would consider simply unthinkable, have, to put it mildly, a tradition of obedience.

It has sometimes been alleged since the Cuban crisis of October 1962 that the senior officers of the Soviet armed forces "resented" Khrushchev's pusillanimous retreat. Quite possibly they did, but evidence that they were ready to do anything about it, or that they played any part at all in the fall of Khrushchev two years later, seems to be entirely lacking.¹⁴

What should now cause accidental war of either variety described above to become more probable in a nuclear age than it has been in the past? We hear mention of the possibility of gadgetry malfunctioning, but fear of such possibilities has already, certainly on our side and

¹⁴ I should naturally refrain from making such observations in an area where I have no personal expertise were I not supported in my views by colleagues who do have the requisite expertise in abundance, especially Drs. Roman Kolkowicz and Thomas W. Wolfe.

presumably on the other as well, caused extensive and elaborate precautionary measures to be taken. The military, for their part, have been placed under tighter wraps than ever before, as evidenced within the past year by the revelation (in press reports for July 15, 1964) that an American officer who was slapped by an East Berlin guard was under orders, which he obeyed, not to strike back.

However, even if one can imagine opposing military units breaking into combat with each other against the wishes of their governments, one also has to explain how and why such hostilities should graduate swiftly to large dimensions. The scenario which depicts it happening usually has to impute to both sides (a) a well-nigh limitless concern with saving face, regardless of risks, and/or (b) a great deal of ground-in automaticity of response and counterresponse, resulting in a swiftly accelerating ascent in scale of violence. There are bound to exist tendencies in these directions, which perhaps need to be watched carefully. But these tendencies do not exist in a vacuum. We should not forget, among other things, that governments maintain communications with their officers in the field, and governments are rarely unmindful of risks.

Of late a good deal of emphasis has been put on still another kind of "accidental" or at least "unpremeditated" war -- that which begins with an uprising in a communist-ruled country contiguous with the West, followed by a more or less irrepressible intervention from our side. The place most often mentioned is East Germany, about which it is easy to conjure up a picture of West German troops streaming across the border to help their brethren. This would of course be another form of "unauthorized" military

actions, which we have already considered, though one also can imagine some degree of complicity from the FRG government. If so, it would have to be in an atmosphere different from the present one.

To be sure, in theory the "accidental" war might arise from an initiative on our part, such as has been advocated by Mr. Dean Acheson. In a series of public statements he has urged that we and especially our allies proceed with a large conventional buildup in order deliberately to force the Russians out of East Germany, presumably through the exploitation or even the stimulation of an uprising. This would bring about the unification of Germany without which, according to Mr. Acheson, peace in Europe cannot ultimately be preserved.¹⁵

In this appeal, Mr. Acheson seems not to have any following. Even those Germans who might share his views on the importance of Germany's reunification are unlikely to consider the preservation of peace in the future a good reason for breaking that peace now. Other Europeans are even more ready to take their chances with a postponement of reunification.

It would be foolish and irresponsible to insist that accidental war is impossible or that the efforts to picture its occurrence in scenarios are misguided. On the contrary, insofar as we are interested in this paper primarily in

¹⁵ One such speech by Mr. Acheson was delivered on September 30, 1963, at the Fifth Annual Conference, in Cambridge, England, of the Institute for Strategic Studies. This speech is published in No. 5 of the "Adelphi Papers" issued by the Institute, No. 5 bearing the title "The Evolution of NATO."

appraising the factors bearing on escalation, we may have to posit or presume hostilities breaking out accidentally in order to have a meaningful point of departure. However, if a conflict breaks out accidentally, that fact itself would have to be of large and direct relevance to the estimates we must subsequently make about the chances of escalation. But we cannot avoid bringing to bear on those estimates a searching inquiry of what the probabilities are for one type of action or reaction as compared with another.

No doubt the capability for dreaming up "far out" events is to be cultivated and cherished, but so is the capability for applying a disciplined judgment about the probability of those events. To do otherwise, to insist always on acting as though the worst conceivable outcome has as good a chance as any of coming to pass, is -- especially on the issue of escalation -- not "playing it safe" but rather giving away needlessly all one's advantages to the opponent.

The same is true of the element of change, which is indeed inevitable -- change in the character of governments and in political conditions as well as in technology. But have we no clues about the changes that the future will bring? Is it not also useful to remind ourselves that the governments of nations that are important to us tend to have distinctive characteristics that are expressed over long periods of time in fairly consistent modes of conduct? Deflections from normal conduct created by the accession to power of highly unusual individuals (e.g., de Gaulle) can also be studied and weighed, and usually it is possible to

make meaningful predictions about how long they will be around and what happens when they go. In short, although we are dealing always with uncertainties about the future, we are dealing also with governments having qualities that make them, in terms of what can be expected of them, akin to persons of known character. One should expect that absorbing the relevant empirical knowledge would therefore help us importantly with our predictions of the future -- as expressed for example, in determining which war game "scenarios" or other types of implied models are relatively realistic, and which are not.

To be sure, sometimes things happen that few had previously thought probable -- occasionally things that no one had conceived of. That does not, however, establish that we must now abandon the notion that some things are very much more probable than others, and that with appropriate study we can have a good deal to say about which is which. A good part of our uncertainty about the future is attributable to the fact that we do not know which contingency will in fact happen among the several that presently strike us as having a fairly good chance of happening. There are, on the other hand, very many that we can eliminate simply as too improbable to be worth a second thought.

Though it is good to be imaginative and important to keep an open mind, it is imperative to avoid basing far-reaching policy decisions on contingencies which can be called conceivable only because someone has conceived of them. In this era when the memory of Winston Churchill is still fresh, it is worth recalling that he made his reputation as a prophet mostly by insisting doggedly in the several years before World War II that Hitlerism was

incompatible with peace. It required at the time no abundant imagination to come to that conclusion -- only the sagacity to concentrate on the important facts and, in that instance, the courage to face and publicly to insist upon the altogether unpleasant implications of those facts.

Change is something to which we are not unaccustomed. We have even learned, through experience, many practical ways for dealing with it. For one thing, we grind into our military budget, still near the 50 billion dollar mark, provision for many unpleasant contingencies, more than a few of which we might be justified in rating as individually most unlikely. Also, change does not always happen suddenly. There is often ample opportunity to reappraise the developing situation in the light of new circumstances. In doing so it is always a good preparatory exercise to have assessed carefully the recent past. Anyway, for the relatively near term to which we are confining ourselves in this analysis (i.e., about ten years) many of the most important factors that have strongly characterized the last twenty years are likely still to be around.

IV. THE ATTENUATION OF INCENTIVES FOR "GOING FIRST"

We referred in our opening remarks to another feature of the strategic environment of today, and probably of increasing moment in the near future, that must have a great and possibly decisive influence in reducing the danger of uncontrolled escalation following from any local outbreak. It is the rapidly diminishing (i.e., in 1965) advantage and thus incentive of going first in any strategic exchange. Until recently the advantage of striking first in such an exchange promised to be so huge and so obviously decisive that it was itself the chief factor that would make for rapid escalation to general war following outbreak of hostilities between the Soviet Union and the United States. With the recent extraordinary diminution in vulnerability of the retaliatory forces, however, most conspicuously on the American side, but presumably progressing also in the other side, the incentive for going first has drastically declined.

Among the situations reflecting this reduction of incentive is the well-known targeting dilemma with which American strategic analysts have lately been preoccupied. The general consensus approving the no-cities targeting philosophy -- on the ground that in a swift-moving war there is no strategic utility in destroying cities ("hostages are better than corpses") and plenty of positive incentive for mutually avoiding them -- is overlaid with a growing concern that counterforce targets may prove of steadily diminishing attractiveness. The reason is that even at best the residual damage-producing capabilities of the enemy after an American counterforce strike are likely

to remain huge. From being a good "damage limiting" system, a strategy stressing counterforce targets may become simply the least bad system. The strong moral and political inhibitions Americans have always felt in the nuclear era against hitting first with nuclear weapons will now be supported on the strategic level by cold calculations that will impress one with a lack of urgency about doing so. The same disincentives will no doubt be even more obvious on the Soviet side.

We have also noted that with respect to tactical use of nuclear weapons the advantages of first use still appear great, and no radical diminution of these advantages is in sight. Tactical air forces especially tend to be so vulnerable to surprise nuclear attack as to create in themselves a strong incentive for going nuclear -- in any substantial hostilities where both sides might possess nuclear weapons.

The implications of the crucial change just described in the general strategic environment of our times appear to be quite generally overlooked. From time to time events occur which alter profoundly all previous appreciations of strategic essentials, and this seems to be one of them. It is not an inevitable change, for one can imagine improvements in missile performance that might tend to nullify the advantages of some kinds of hardening. But we have plenty of experience from the past to remind us that technology moves always along a broad front, and there is more than a trick or two available also for the defenses. It seems in the net fairly safe to predict that the degree of advantage that was until recently thought to accrue to the side making a surprise strategic

attack -- where it could hope to wipe out the retaliatory force of the opponent with near impunity -- is gone and is not likely to return among opponents no more disparate in power than the United States and the Soviet Union have recently become. At any rate, it is not easy to imagine a future government being confident that it can make so effectively one-sided an attack, especially since this kind of confidence was apparently lacking in the past even under circumstances when it was much more warranted than it is ever likely to be again. As Secretary McNamara put the matter early in 1963:

I do not believe we are either unimaginative, or lacking in skill, but I do believe that a careful assessment of the probable increases in the Soviet nuclear power as estimated by the experienced intelligence evaluators in our Government indicate that power will increase in such ways, particularly in such types, that there will not be a possibility for us to build a force that can destroy that power to such a degree that there will not remain elements so large as to cause severe damage to our Nation in retaliation for our ¹⁶destructive effort directed against that power.

¹⁶ Department of Defense Appropriations for 1964, Sub-committee of the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, Washington, D. C., 1963, Part 1, p. 341.

V. WHAT IS THE ENEMY UP TO?

Much of the public discussion concerning the appropriate time for introducing nuclear weapons in tactical operations has neglected to consider the enemy's intention. The criteria mentioned have usually been mechanical phenomena, like scale of hostilities or the rate at which territory is being yielded. One would rather expect the first consideration to be: What is the enemy up to?

This anomalous situation cannot be ascribed to the probable obscurity of the opponent's intention, which, on the contrary, is likely upon the outbreak of any real hostilities to be fairly obvious. It would very likely be reflected in the manifest scale and character of his military preparations, and even more in the scale of his attack. Certainly a deliberate major aggression will look very different from a probing action.

For the sake of deterrence, and to reassure our allies, it would seem appropriate to relate flexibility of response mainly to discrimination of enemy intent. That would make more sense than saying: "We will use conventional weapons until we find ourselves losing." If it be true that the possibility of a deliberate massive Soviet attack against western Europe is exceedingly remote, so much the more reason for avoiding ambiguity concerning our response to it. Most of the public debate about how the United States should resist Soviet (or Chinese) aggression has in fact concerned itself with this particularly remote possibility, for which withholding of nuclear weapons would have the least justification.

A deliberate and massive enemy attack would also minimize the inhibitions of our political leaders against using nuclear weapons. The specter of their being paralyzed by such inhibitions seems to worry a lot of people, though curiously they are generally the same people who do not want to use nuclear weapons anyway. The pertinent argument is familiar: "We should be ready to fight the first stages of a war in Europe conventionally if only because commitment to hostilities on a large scale is the only way we can be sure of using nuclear weapons when needed." This attitude surely reflects, among other things, lack of sensitivity to the shock effects of a major military attack which disrupts a condition of peace. One might add that following such a policy would be the best way to assure that if nuclear weapons were ever used they would be used on a large and extremely destructive scale rather than a small one.

But are we really justified in assigning a very low order of probability to a deliberate and massive enemy attack? In discussing military contingencies in Europe, such attack is what we have talked about most of the time. Americans who accept gratefully the idea that general war between the great nuclear powers has become extremely improbable nevertheless find unsettling the effects of that conclusion upon their estimate of the probabilities of war on any lesser scale. Many seem to be tacitly (and occasionally even explicitly) assuming that the probability of some kind of war occurring has remained basically fixed -- after all, there have always been wars -- and thus if general war is now less likely, it must follow that limited war (including quite large-scale limited war) has become

more so! Others, not quite so mechanistic in their conceptions, nevertheless argue that because the defender cannot meaningfully threaten "massive retaliation" in the event of local transgressions by the aggressor, the latter's inducement to undertake such transgressions is greatly increased.

One might suppose that the same factors that dissuade the Russians from making a strategic attack upon the United States operate also to dissuade them from attempting a deliberate large-scale land attack upon or invasion of western Europe. It would be the kind of operation that would come closest to triggering the general war that they are, with good reason, desperately anxious to avoid. Besides, it is difficult to discover what meaningful incentives the Russians might have for attempting to conquer western Europe -- that is, incentives that are even remotely commensurate with the risks. The idea that through such conquest they might be tempted to gain important economic advantages, such as absorption of the productive plant of western Europe, was never worth serious consideration even when the Russians were much further behind industrially than they are now.¹⁷

¹⁷ It has been a recurrent notion among American military planners (and some French) that if the Russians got into a major war with the NATO powers, they would try to spare western Europe from atomic destruction in order to be able to absorb and utilize its productive plant at war's end. This idea seems never to have suggested itself to the Russians, who instead developed under Khrushchev the "hostage" principle of defense, that is, the principle that MRBMs directed against western Europe were as good, or almost as good, a deterrent against the United States as ICBMs directed against our

Thus we are forced again to the conclusion that large-scale tactical war in Europe, if it occurs at all, must take place through escalation from Soviet probing actions. According to Soviet ideology it could occur also, and almost exclusively, as a result of an attack by us upon them. The chances for the latter event we naturally rate very low. Insofar, however, as the Russians could conceivably act by pre-emption, we have to examine the possibilities in crisis situations for their total misjudgment of our intentions, but now we are obviously looking at fairly extreme outside possibilities.

Anyway, it would seem that the most fruitful question we could ask about the use of nuclear weapons in tactical operations, especially in Europe, would be: How could their use, or nonuse, or threat of use affect the prospects of escalation from small-scale to large-scale combat? We should not be talking, at least not initially, about using a great many nuclear weapons; that is a possibility that occurs only after a conflict has already graduated to large proportions. We are interested mainly in seeing how it can be prevented from ever reaching such proportions. We are interested, in other words, in the deterrence of escalation -- though not for a moment are we less interested in the deterrence of initial hostilities.

In that connection, we have to observe that the phrase "if deterrence fails" rolls rather too readily off the tongue among those many defense specialists whose work

ZI. The Russian view seems more reasonable than the above-mentioned contrasting one. Modern nuclear wars are not likely to be fought for plunder, which in any case may be difficult to transfer.

requires them to think about what happens in actual combat. Certainly the phrase begs many questions. For the purpose of deciding what our defense posture should be, one has to consider some all-important intermediate questions, like: Why should deterrence fail? How could it fail? How can we keep it from failing? The last of these questions should always be capable of a positive answer. Unless we are dealing with utter madmen, there is no conceivable reason why in any showdown with the Soviet Union, appropriate manipulations of force and threats of force, along with more positive diplomatic maneuvers, cannot prevent deterrence from failing. That is one respect in which the world is different now from what it was in 1939 or 1914.

VI. THE STATUS QUO AS A STANDARD

The suggestion above that today we should be able reliably to avoid major war without politically disastrous retreats implies the existence of two circumstances: (1) that we have preferably a commanding superiority in our overall force posture, but at least a position that we cannot be induced to recognize as inferior; and (2) that there be some standard in the world by which both sides can, at least within reasonable limits, simultaneously distinguish acceptable behavior from the intolerably deviant kind.

The standard that leaps at once to mind on territorial issues, which historically have been the great provokers of war, is naturally the status quo. Thus the two circumstances described above are rather closely related, because the requirement in superiority for enabling one to stand against aggressive encroachments upon the status quo will normally be less than that necessary to gain changes by aggression. Obviously other characteristics matter too, but rarely enough to obliterate the distinction between superiority and inferiority. Historically the aggressors have been those who have been ready to make the most of a superiority that might indeed be only temporary or localized, but they have usually sought to satisfy themselves that that superiority was real rather than merely fictitious.

What is superiority? is a question that has always had more complications than appeared on the surface. Napoleon's famous dictum that "the moral is to the material as three is to one" was a shrewd but even in his time a fairly standard reflection on the perennial unwisdom of merely counting up guns or divisions or whatnot. When Nelson met

Villeneuve at Trafalgar, both men were agreed on who was superior, though the French admiral clearly had more ships and guns under his command.

In our own time the problem has become enormously more complicated as a result of the special intolerability of nuclear devastation, and our quotation from Secretary McNamara above (p. 33) expresses just one additional facet of the problem. However, it is perhaps fortunate for the United States that difficulty in achieving contentment with the traditional indices of superiority seems to mount more or less proportionately to the degree of sophistication with which one approaches the problem, and crisis situations appear to induce on both sides regression to relatively primitive evaluations. Prior to the Cuban crisis there was a special danger that given our national preoccupation with the importance of conventional forces, we would talk ourselves into a conviction of inferiority regarding the local situation of Berlin. But fortunately, the Russians put us right by their behavior during and after that crisis. Superiority, they in effect argued, was not as divisible either regionally or in terms of weaponry as we had supposed; also, the degree of superiority that they were willing to credit to us was enough and to spare for our purpose, which both in the Caribbean and Berlin was essentially the maintenance of the status quo.

This brings us again to the special importance of the status quo, which in the past has too often been dismissed because it always fell short of the ideal. But whatever limitations the status quo may have, there has always been a certain sanctity about things-as-they-happen-to-be. One

surmises that that is so because things-as-they-happen-to-be are in certain matters, especially boundaries, conspicuously inseparable from peace, or at least from nonfighting. The essence of President Kennedy's case against the Soviet missiles in Cuba was, as stated in his famous speech of October 22, 1962, that they represented a sudden change in the status quo of military power: ". . . this secret, swift, and extraordinary buildup of Communist missiles . . . this sudden clandestine decision . . . is a deliberately provocative and unjustified change in the status quo. . . ."

It happens that the maintenance of the status quo is usually also supported by international law, which is to say by written international agreements, rights of prescription, custom, etc. Everyone knows that there are often disagreements, sometimes serious, about what international law really stipulates (e.g., is the MacMahon line the legally correct boundary between India and China?), but superimposed on these disagreements is the very strong feeling that, if there is fighting, whatever situation prevailed before fighting began was somehow in some degree right because it was compatible with nonfighting, and whoever started the fighting was, for the reason of doing so, blameworthy. Actually this strong feeling is itself dignified by being enshrined in international law, which in the United Nations Charter and various other general or multilateral treaties specifically forbids resort to force except in self-defense.

We are accustomed to some states being called status quo powers, and to other states being called revisionist. These distinctions usually mean that the states so indicated

not only have incompatible desires concerning the future of the world, but markedly different attitudes concerning the acceptability of the present. Nevertheless, however much revisionist powers may dislike existing boundaries or other arrangements, they must not find them intolerable; they share with the status quo powers a common perception of the awful significance of stepping over those lines which at any one time represent the general working consensus concerning boundaries.

In Germany today, both sides are at the same time revisionist in some respects and status quo in others. Both recognize the status quo to be, by formal stipulation, temporary; but since they cannot agree on how to go about changing it, the status quo has acquired a powerful sanction of legitimacy. The Russians want to make permanent the existing division between East and West Germany, but they would also like to change the status of West Berlin. The western powers, on the other hand, are committed to holding their position in Berlin, but they are revisionist in being committed (with varying degrees of intensity) to seeing Germany reunified.

The United States and its allies have customarily shown more relaxation about the existing state of affairs than the Russians, but that is less a matter of the tolerability or intolerability of the existing conditions to each side than it is of the basic philosophy each has concerning its appropriate posture towards the possibility of securing change. The Russians, being doctrinaire activists, are committed to relentlessness in securing all possible changes favorable to them so long as no undue risks are involved; it is the possibility of favorable change which

will alone determine for them how "insupportable" the present really is. The United States and its allies, on the other hand, have no such compulsion to exploit whatever marginal opportunities for change come their way, and in general prefer not to stir up trouble. This is the key difference between the side that pushes and the side that cannot become really aroused until it is pushed. Thus the latter determines by its response what the former will find tolerable or intolerable. But if it is staunch about resisting, then both sides are equally clear that peace can persist only so long as neither attempts to overthrow the existing arrangement by force.

Inasmuch as, in the present instance, both sides abundantly prefer a not too unhappy peace to any kind of war, they appear reconciled to continuing indefinitely what was once recognized by both to 'e a temporary state of affairs. This indispensable consensus does not exclude what we used to call "peaceful change," which is to say the pursuit and accomplishment of more stable (i.e., mutually satisfactory) arrangements through various forms of accommodation reached by negotiation. And naturally the status quo we wish to defend concerns mainly international territorial arrangements, not domestic conditions, which we know to be desperate over a large part of the world and which we have already devoted much of our wealth and power to helping to alleviate.

There seems little doubt that the territorial status quo has gained markedly in sanctity in the nuclear era. The responsibility for upsetting an existing state of peace becomes much heavier when that disturbance has a measurable chance of setting off nuclear weapons. More

to the point, the side contemplating aggression must make its estimate of the outcome in the knowledge that if major war results, the possibility of its achieving gains that outweigh penalties is by orders of magnitude more dubious than it has ever before appeared to any aggressor. Thus, the stability of the present situation rests largely on the unprecedented lack of ambiguity between what is at worst an unhappy situation, and to most of the major parties not even that, and what on the other hand would be obviously quite awful.

This condition is reflected, for example, in the practically universal persuasion in Germany today that reunification must be accomplished ohne Krieg -- without war. The kind of irredentism that played so large a part in producing the two world wars does not exist today in Europe. Whatever their ignorance about the specific effects of nuclear weapons, the Europeans know quite enough about war generally, and they also know well enough how much worse it would be with nuclear weapons, to be clear that they cannot afford flammable irredentas. However, they have also been playing the game long enough to know that the benefits of the present situation, which convincingly promises peace despite the most potent ideological cleavage in Europe at least since the age of the religious wars, depends on maintaining the marvelous clarity of the choice between nonwar and destruction. This in brief explains why many sensible and knowledgeable Europeans could be so alarmed at the American effort deliberately to make the nuclear threat more ambiguous -- which is one inevitable interpretation of the effort to expand "options" -- rather than less so.

One should notice also the kind of asymmetry between aggressor and defender that normally eases the problem of decision for the latter. One should not push this point too far. The aggressor leaders may well have the disposition to bear with ease the special burdens of aggressive action, but those burdens are real and formidable. Even Hitler, in disposition the archetype of the aggressor, was prepared in 1936 to withdraw the forces he had sent to reoccupy the right bank of the Rhine -- if the French had shown an inclination to move. It was not only that the French at that time were militarily superior; Hitler knew that he stood out as the one who was disturbing the status quo in a way that could produce a war. It is obvious that for most governments, conspicuously including our own, the problem of deciding to use force is enormously eased if they find themselves in the position of resisting aggression rather than perpetrating it. Something of this quality is reflected in the vast difference in behavior of the same U.S. government between the Bay of Pigs episode of April 1961 and the Cuban crisis of October 1962.

A kind of misplaced recognition of this factor is reflected in the repeated reference to the problem in a crisis of "shooting first." Thus, it is sometimes alleged, in trying to keep us out of Berlin the Russians could play a very clever game by putting us in a position where we have to fire the first shot to force our way through an obstacle that is blocking access. This point has certainly been exaggerated. The question of who has actually pulled the trigger first on a hand weapon like a rifle is likely to prove an obscure detail that cannot be objectively recalled to anyone's complete satisfaction. The

erection of the obstacle in the first place, in violation of prevailing rules of access, would be a much more conspicuous departure from the status quo and thus the initiating act of aggression. One form of transgression easily overwhelms the other. When Hitler charged that it was the Poles who had begun World War II by opening fire on German soldiers, nobody outside Germany believed him. Yet even if the statement had been literally true and had been believed, the fact that the dangerous situation in which the firing occurred had been created entirely by Hitler would have dominated the relevant attitudes of other people and statesmen.

It should not now be necessary to add that a deliberate massive attack by one great power against the forces of another has always in modern times been an extraordinarily serious and deeply shocking event, and that it is bound to be even more so in a world that knows nuclear weapons. However, the debate on nuclear versus conventional strategies or "options" has so sharply focused men's minds on the dread consequences of using nuclear weapons that the very act of aggression that might invoke these possibilities has been excessively deflated by comparison. In many discussions of the issue, the fact of aggression is given about the emotional loading of an enemy prank. It is supposed to be contained in a manner that is effective but at the same time tolerant and wise. The argument above that we should be unambiguous at least about opposing with nuclear arms any deliberate and massive Soviet attack in Europe is in one sense only a plea to resume treating such aggression with the seriousness it deserves.

VII. ON ENEMY CAPABILITIES VERSUS INTENTIONS

The defense community has long been ambivalent concerning the question whether our defense preparations and planning must be responsive to enemy capabilities or to enemy intentions. The answer has to be, and is inevitably, to both.

Enemy capabilities, to the (probably considerable) degree that we succeed in measuring them, certainly provide us the basic raw data about our defense needs. In the kinds of forces we consider to matter most, we are able and determined to be comfortably superior, and we measure our success in achieving that superiority by making the obvious comparisons between their strength and ours. On the other hand, it is also clear that our defense efforts, large as they are, are considerably below what they could be if we became really alarmed about our chances of keeping the peace. Surely, then, our composure argues a persuasion that the opponent does not mean to have a war with us, at least not soon. Actually, when it comes to deciding not only the magnitude but also the character of our preparations, we correctly and necessarily let ourselves be guided by our beliefs, guesses, or convictions about what the opponent is now or may in the future be up to.

It has, or the other hand, never been quite respectable to admit that important planning judgments are based on our conceptions of enemy intentions. Those intentions are often held to be changeable, and our conceptions of them are generally considered to be more subjective, tenuous, and faulty than our conceptions about the size and quality of his military forces. We can also be in

error about the latter, but normally we expend much more effort in seeking knowledge of enemy forces, and the data we examine in that pursuit are certainly more tangible and therefore more apparently "objective" than they are in the other case. It is often alleged, besides, that the opponent's military capabilities are really the best clue we have to his intentions, but the important core of truth in that assertion depends on the discrimination and sensitivity with which we scrutinize his military expenditures and capabilities. It is not only how much he spends on military force that matters, but also how he chooses to spend it, and why. What is the significance, for example, of the readily observable fact that a very large proportion of the sums the Russians have spent on "air power" has habitually gone into air defense?

Intelligence about enemy capabilities can be and is generally presented in hard figures, and in the kinds of descriptions of physical things that almost everyone interested in the matter feels he can understand. The knowledge may be difficult to come by in terms of access, but only in its refinements is it especially esoteric. By contrast, the knowledge that enables our experts to make shrewd surmises on Soviet intentions is highly esoteric, although most of the relevant research materials are readily available in completely open sources. These carefully trained experts, who have learned how to weight and organize the data revealing Soviet beliefs, fixations, aspirations, and problems, will also have a difficult time communicating their knowledge or insights to policy-makers. The latter are as often as not distrustful of the reliability of this particular brand of scholarship. Never-

theless, the message does tend to get through, though inevitably with some delay and distortion.

In any case, we must accept the following two points: First, official American estimates of U.S. military requirements are inevitably colored deeply by the policy-makers' conceptions of the opponent's intentions -- which suggests that we ought to keep these conceptions as explicit as possible and subject to continuous, systematic review. Second, our capabilities, and the opponent's, are important less for determining who would win a major nuclear conflict, which neither he nor we will care to see proceed to any conclusive test, than for their bearing on the questions that immediately arise concerning any projected crisis: What will the opponent under certain contingencies be likely to do? How will he respond to what we do? What, under these considerations, can we bring ourselves to do?

In our spontaneous, entirely intuited, ambivalent, and highly uncertain answers to questions akin to these are wrapped up all our fears and doubts about escalation. The control of escalation is an exercise in deterrence. We try first and foremost to deter the opponent from doing that which will start a conflict; if he starts one, we try to deter him from enlarging it, or even from continuing it. Deterrence at any level thus naturally means the negative governance of enemy intentions; specifically, it means inducing the enemy to confine his actions to levels far below those delimited by his capabilities.

VIII. THE NEW AND DIFFERENT EUROPE

It ought to be easy to win agreement that Europe is a vastly different place as concerns the probability of major war from what it was in 1914, or in 1939. It is also worth remembering that Europe in 1939 was different from Europe in 1914. With the emotions and attitudes prevailing in 1914, it was all too easy for the mediocre men controlling certain governments to start a great war. It took, on the other hand, the evil genius of a Hitler to start another world war in 1939. Among the major participating powers the first war began with great floods of nationalist enthusiasm, which endured, despite enormous casualties, for two whole years -- enabling Britain during that time, for example, to send to France well over 1,000,000 men who were recruited on a strictly volunteer basis. World War II, on the other hand, began with a deeply contrasting spirit of glumness and dismay, not less in Berlin than in Paris or London.

Today all Europeans, including especially the Russians, have had the experience of two world wars to condition their attitudes towards the kinds of political problems that previously produced wars, and also towards war itself. Those wars are seen by the peoples of Europe simply as immense catastrophes, devoid of traces of glory such as clung to former wars. The idea that there could be any object apart from sheer survival worth the fighting of another great war is plainly not there. One of the many indices of the remarkably complete rejection of the war-fighting past, with all its bloodshed among nations of essentially a common civilization, is the extraordinary

degree to which the French-German reconciliation has reached deeply into the attitudes of the respective peoples. It is far from being merely a creation of a few people at the top. And the people at the top, one might occasionally recall, no longer come from that hereditary aristocracy, with its peculiarly militaristic and chauvinistic way of life derived from ages past, that ruled the great empires of central and eastern Europe until World War I. That class has simply disappeared.

Added to the experience of two world wars, with their attendant changes, is now the nuclear bomb, a device which pretty nearly universally forecloses any doubt about the catastrophic nature of major war. It seems therefore completely to change the requirements of security -- in a way which for most Europeans tends to spell relaxation rather than the reverse. Preoccupied as they are with their unprecedented prosperity, and aware also of their diminished status as compared with the two superpowers, they are content to enjoy what seem to them to be the benefits of this change, as for example the avoidance or very partial tolerance of conscription.

There is obviously a negative note in all this. Some observers have pointed out that the Europe we are describing is too pacifically inclined not only to start a war but also to resist resolutely any major aggression from the East. The Europeans may, it is said, loudly clamor for putting a tough nuclear face on our common provisions for defense, but in a crisis any threat to use nuclear weapons is far more likely to frighten than to reassure them. This point, as it happens, is frequently made in

support of building up and giving greater emphasis to conventional forces.

The trouble with this argument is not that its basic premise is untrue but that it is not rigorous enough in conforming to that premise. When and if a situation arises in which the Europeans reject out of fear any thought of using nuclear weapons in their own defense, they are not likely to be eager to fight conventionally either, especially inasmuch as no commitment to conventional defense can go beyond the offer to begin fighting conventionally. However, even if we could promise what is in fact impossible to promise -- that we would keep large-scale hostilities conventional -- a third world war in any case means to most Europeans simply the death of Europe. If a conventional buildup is advocated on the grounds that it will buy more backbone for our allies in a crisis, we really ought to look very carefully at the promised payoff to see whether the margin of alleged advantage justifies the considerable cost.

If these rather commonplace observations seem to strike at the basic philosophy of NATO, it may simply be because we need to recall the original image of NATO to the Europeans. What NATO meant originally was an American commitment to Europe -- a unilateral guarantee in the guise of an alliance of equals -- sufficient to deter Soviet aggression. Everything else was mainly supplementary, and hopefully not too expensive, "burden sharing." Changes in these attitudes as a result of European recovery have been on the whole rather marginal and superficial. The American drive for greater efficiency in the defense structure, for greater rationality in war-fighting plans,

and for various related values has always seemed to most Europeans somewhat beside the point. The essence of NATO to the European is the American presence in and commitment to Europe, alongside of which nothing else greatly matters. De Gaulle may have other ideas, but he is not carrying Europe, or even France, along with him in those ideas -- and he is after all 75.

The other side of the coin is that the Soviet Union seems to most Europeans to be offering no serious threat of aggression. There is still, to be sure, a deep ideological cleavage between the Soviet Union and the NATO powers, a cleavage that has been attended by what seemed to be a kind of perennial and spontaneous mutual hostility. Yet even in this respect the situation looks considerably less grim than it did only a few years ago.

There has been for one thing the Sino-Soviet split, which has now survived a change of leadership in the Soviet Union. Some Americans have cautioned that the net effect of such a split could be to our disadvantage, an idea which no doubt has some shade of justification. Yet one wonders how much this attitude reflects simply the modern "cult of the ominous." Each side may indeed be in competition with the other to prove that it is orthodox in its pursuit of world revolution, but how does the split affect the risks that each is willing to take in offering that proof? It seems likely that the division has played an important part in modifying favorably from our point of view the behavior of the Soviet Union, and possibly also that of Communist China; certainly it has highlighted usefully for us the contrast

between doctrinaire China and the more flexible, perhaps even mellowed, Russia.¹⁸

The Cuban crisis of 1962 also had a major effect on subsequent Soviet conduct, no doubt because it shocked the Soviet leaders into awareness that the United States was prepared for military confrontations over issues that while gravely important did not have to be desperate for the United States. Equally important, it gave American political leaders new insights into some relevant aspects of Soviet conduct, one result of which will be to reduce for some time any leverage the Russians might have sought to derive from sheer bellicosity. Less than a year after the crisis the Russians proved themselves willing to sign the same test-ban treaty that they had previously rejected with derision.

There is also the clear fact that the European satellites of the Soviet Union have achieved much greater autonomy in both their domestic and foreign affairs than we used to think was possible for them. If local communist leaders prove unmalleable, world revolution as a goal must glitter somewhat less in Moscow eyes.

About the Soviet Union itself we have already had occasion to observe (a) that while it has been and continues to be aggressive politically, with a good deal of bluster and occasional threats, its military behavior has always been extremely cautious; (b) that it has simply

¹⁸ On the subject of "The Soviet Union and the Sino-Soviet Dispute," see the "Statement" by Dr. Thomas W. Wolfe of The RAND Corporation, before the Subcommittee on the Far East and the Pacific, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Washington, D. C., March 11, 1965.

not shown any interest in conquering Western Europe, especially since it has gained enough confidence in its own strength to worry less about being invaded from the West; and (c) that though it would clearly like to see West Berlin fall into the communist camp, it is equally clearly unwilling to undertake any real risk of hostilities with the United States to bring about that event. All this helps confirm the fact that the Soviet Union has since World War II been profoundly impressed with U.S. strength.

Obviously, these few pages on what has happened to Europe since 1914 (we have hardly more than mentioned China) can only suggest the main trends and indicate the relevance of those trends to our main problem. One of the essential points to note is that the imperfections of any instrument designed to deter aggression must be considered against the real burden of weight that that instrument must bear. The importance of NATO is primarily in establishing the American presence in Europe. The imperfections of NATO must be measured against that fact, and also against the fact that the Soviet Union has shown itself on the record to be less than avid to pursue a career of nuclear blackmail against us.

Again we need to anticipate the reminder that the world changes. So indeed it does, but we have already discussed that earlier.¹⁹ What we have been describing in this brief section are some trends that are (a) relevant to our own inquiry about escalation, (b) of long-term duration, and (c) basic rather than merely superficial.

¹⁹ See above, pp. 28-30.

IX. HOW BIG AN ATTACK?

We have suggested that the contingency that ought to be put among the lowest levels of probability is the deliberate, massive attack of the Soviet field forces against the NATO line in central Europe. This happens to be the kind of war outbreak in Europe that has been the most discussed in official circles and that no doubt has absorbed far the major part of NATO planning. It is indeed the way major wars in Europe have traditionally begun in modern times -- prior to the era of nuclear weapons. Today it is virtually impossible to discover in the real world the considerations that could make the Soviet leaders undertake to do such a thing in the face of the enormous risks they would be incurring -- risks that are certainly not slighted in their military and political doctrine.

What sorts of changes should one take into account that might basically alter this assessment?

Perhaps one should allow for the possibility that the risks presently deterring massive aggression westward may in the future appear to the Russians to have been virtually eliminated -- as for example through the complete disintegration of NATO. This would presumably involve the departure of the U.S. presence from Europe, and thus for any useful purpose of present strategic analysis it must be reckoned beyond our terms of reference. Still, if one wants to speculate, one should also remember that it would make a considerable difference what had caused the disintegration of NATO. It might have collapsed because fear of Russia had been too far reduced,

in which case a revival of danger might perhaps permit something like NATO to be reconstituted. One would also still have to find those hard-to-discover Russian incentives for military expansion westward.

No doubt one should consider also the possibility that relevant Soviet military doctrine will materially change. Clearly it has been undergoing some modification in recent years. In general, Soviet doctrine has been much more conservative than ours, as reflected, in one relevant example, in its skepticism and even derision regarding American propensities for making frequent and easy distinctions between limited and general, and especially between nonnuclear and nuclear war. There has been some slight Soviet yielding of ground in this respect over the last two years, but the confidence of various American observers that the Russians are simply "six or seven years behind us" -- with the clear implication that after the appropriate lapse of time they will be about where we are now -- seems to be quite unwarranted.²⁰

For one thing, where really are we now? People who make the judgment just cited usually represent a distinct school of thought -- that which places maximum emphasis on conventional capabilities -- that considers the logic of its position so compelling as to be self-evident. Yet

²⁰ See especially the following: Leon Gouré, Notes on the Second Edition of Marshal V. D. Sokolovskii's "Military Strategy," The Rand Corporation, RM-3972-PR, February 1964; also Thomas W. Wolfe, Soviet Strategy at the Crossroads, The RAND Corporation, RM-4085-PR, April 1964, and Trends in Soviet Thinking on Theatre Warfare, Conventional Operations, and Limited War, The RAND Corporation, RM-4305-PR, December 1964.

the fact that substantial parts even of the U.S. defense community have not been won over suggests that the opinions the latter resist, though possibly correct, are not self-evidently so. Thus, even if the Russians march always in a straight line towards that truth that all right-thinking men must consider obvious -- a rash presumption in itself -- the position and direction of that line are not as clearly visible as some hold.

Also, we must consider the usual hiatus, common enough in our own country in all but exceptional times, between official military ideas, especially bold and advanced ones, and official political action. We must remember, too, that the milieu in which Soviet military ideas are formed and developed is totally different from ours, being much more confined to "responsible" circles of authority, and that is not likely to change soon.

Finally, and perhaps most important, changes of any kind in strategic ideas do not happen all that fast. Often we can well afford to wait and see. If the Russians are really going to develop a doctrine that would make a "Hamburg grab" kind of strategy on their part conceivable (i.e., a sharply delimited attack made by conventional arms alone in defiance of our tactical nuclear power), which it certainly is not under their present outlook, we are likely to be able to see it coming a long way off. How much, then, should we anticipate it now?

One should no doubt also hedge predictive statements about future Soviet moves against the possibility that some technological breakthrough may alter in favor of the Soviets the current imputed strategic stalemate. One might notice, however, that inasmuch as what we now call

stalemate is compatible with very great U.S. numerical and qualitative superiority, a break in the Russian favor that totally upset such a stalemate would have to be drastic indeed. No doubt if the Russians enjoyed the kind of superiority we presently enjoy they would behave differently from the way they are currently behaving -- especially with respect to Berlin. Thus, "stalemate" is partly a matter of who is superior to whom. Nevertheless, stalemate does seem to be inherently compatible with rather wide disparity. The Russians have after all not proved themselves to be enormously cleverer and more courageous than we, and the kind of situation that limits us would, if reversed, limit them as well. Naturally, one does not wish to test this contention by giving up general superiority, which at the very least adds to our feeling of comfort. Nor does there at this time seem to be an impelling reason why we should have to.

Returning now to the initial proposition of this section: All of these considerations induce us to place a far higher probability on conflicts breaking out initially on a small rather than on a grand scale, over issues that are relatively isolated, specific, and regionally limited. To repeat a point made earlier but important enough to bear repetition: It is a fairly safe prediction that from now on neither side will be able seriously and convincingly to use for political ends threats of strategic nuclear attack, or anything that in scale is even close to it. What one can threaten are lesser actions that could start events moving in that direction. The opponent cannot at any stage be deprived of the choice, within his capabilities, of making the

situation more dangerous or less so; but we can reasonably hope and expect to influence his choices appropriately. This is what we must henceforth mean by containing aggression militarily.²¹

One surmises that the steps taken by us to cope with such aggression ought to have the following three general characteristics: Our military measures ought, so far as possible, (a) to be effective enough initially to prevent extensive deterioration of the military situation, especially such deterioration as basically alters the character of that situation; (b) to be limited enough to leave unused, at least temporarily, such higher levels of violence as are not likely to be immediately necessary to accomplish objective (a) -- levels which must be most unattractive for the enemy to enter; and (c) to be determined enough to show that we are not more unwilling than he to move towards those higher levels. One should notice that while stipulation (a) asserts what is certainly most desirable even if not in all cases essential and (b) simply defines limited war, (c) establishes what is essential to effective containment through limited means. Without (c) we either lose outright, or we encourage the enemy to move to

²¹ If this proposition seems to be of only limited applicability to the current guerrilla warfare in Vietnam, one of the differences is the obvious reluctance of the U.S. government to make a major commitment of its own ground forces to the fighting. This reluctance is in large part a heritage of the Korean War, and seems not to have been importantly affected by our having markedly built up our ground forces in the interim.

higher levels of violence in which we avoid losing only by following him. It is obviously preferable to make clear to him before he reaches for those higher levels that it will avail him nothing to do so.

X. THE "FIREBREAK" THEORY

Before we proceed further we must consider a theory or point of view that has received a good deal of emphasis especially in the United States. It is by now easily identified by simple reference to the term "firebreak" in its special application to signify at the tactical level the distinction between the use and nonuse of nuclear weapons.²² With that distinction frequently goes an advocacy, more or less intense, of the idea that maintaining it is all-important with respect to such matters as escalation and that it is the only practicable distinction in sight upon which we can hope to base a policy of limitations in war. Thus, the "firebreak" is not only a phenomenon to be recognized but represents also an idea or conviction to be actively promoted, partly through preaching its merits to the unconverted both at home and abroad.

Let us first acknowledge that insofar as the term simply connotes a belief that there is an important

²² The first use known to me of the term "firebreak" in this connection was by Dr. Alain C. Enthoven, who has delivered a number of public speeches elucidating the theory or philosophy discussed in this section. A speech of his on this subject that won particular attention was that given before the Loyola University Forum for National Affairs, at Los Angeles, California, February 10, 1963. I should add, however, that certain cognate terms to express more or less the same idea are of much older use. I have myself referred to "the vast watershed of difference" between use and nonuse of nuclear weapons in my Strategy in the Missile Age, The RAND Corporation, R-335, January 15, 1959. See especially p. 327.

difference in kind as well as degree between nuclear and nonnuclear weapons, almost everyone must now subscribe to the firebreak idea. The notion that the atomic bomb is "just another weapon" was always flagrantly insensitive even if not wholly illogical -- insensitive to the importance of a distinction, however arbitrary, that most of the world was obviously going to insist upon.

The fact that the United States did not use nuclear weapons in the Korean War was unquestionably due mostly to certain special circumstances not likely to be repeated in the future.²³ Nevertheless, it did betray in addition a feeling that nuclear weapons were different and that invoking their use to any degree whatsoever even when the tactical situation was developing badly for us must require a special and weighty decision. When President Truman, in a press conference during that war, indicated that he and his advisers had been "considering" their possible use in Korea, the then British Prime Minister, Mr. (now Earl) Clement Atlee, rushed to Washington to persuade the President not to do so.

Whether the Prime Minister's anxieties made sense under the circumstances is quite beside the point. What

²³ I have described these special circumstances in my R-335, Strategy in the Missile Age, pp. 319f. Briefly summarized, the reasons were (a) limited stockpile; (b) underestimation of the effects of nuclear weapons against such tactically important objects as bridges; (c) Pentagon and Administration conviction that North Korean attack was a Soviet feint and that Soviet attack in Europe was impending, requiring conservation of limited bombs; (d) fears and objections of our allies, especially Britain. The first three of these cannot again occur.

mattered was that the mere mention of nuclear weapons by the President was enough to precipitate his trip, and that few if any people considered his behavior odd. We must, in other words, be aware that since the beginning of the nuclear era there has been in the minds of men a strong tendency to distinguish between nuclear and nonnuclear weapons combined with a widespread fear of and aversion to the former, and this distinction and aversion have tended for a variety of reasons to grow stronger with time rather than weaker. Recognition of that important fact however, obviously leaves untouched the question whether it is in the U.S. interest to advance, reinforce, and universalize that distinction or on the contrary simply to accommodate to it, perhaps to the minimum degree possible. It might even be reasonable to argue that the United States ought to seek by its words and acts to moderate or deflate the distinction, but it would hardly be reasonable to argue that we should simply ignore it.

It is important also to recognize that today, as distinct from the situation that obtained until some six or eight years ago, a nearly universal consensus exists within the ranks of professional military people that small military operations are simply out of bounds so far as concerns the use of nuclear weapons. How large such operations have to become before this particular consensus among the military dissolves into an opposing one would be difficult to ascertain -- views would probably vary widely among individual officers -- but we should recognize that the former consensus unquestionably extends over a fairly considerable and quite important zone of contingencies.

Thus, on that issue there is no need to convert the already converted.

Let us also be clear that at present the United States, especially when acting together with her allies, already possesses a substantial nonnuclear capability, certainly one able to cope effectively with any quasi-accidental outbreak of fighting or small foray, both in Europe and in the Far East. If, for example, there were to be another Quemoy crisis like that of 1958, it is most doubtful that any voices would be raised, as some then were, to insist that we ought to intervene with nuclear weapons or not at all. For recognition of the kind of world we live in, this represents real progress.

The above observations, on the other hand, are not likely to satisfy the more enthusiastic advocates of the firebreak idea, who usually insist at the very least that we should postpone any initiative in introducing nuclear weapons until a high level of military operations is reached. Inescapably, this school also advocates building up our conventional capabilities -- and persuading our allies to do likewise -- in order to be able to sustain a high level of conventional combat, that is, in order that we should not have to shift from conventional to nuclear weapons "out of weakness." The exact quantitative level that these advocates have in mind, which will of course vary with individuals, is less interesting, however, than some of the ideas that seem to be implicit and occasionally explicit in their arguments.

For example, the standard argument for rejecting as a useful firebreak any discrimination according to size of nuclear weapons is that it gives the enemy too much

opportunity to mistake or deliberately to exaggerate the size of the bombs one has used, and thus to proceed to use larger ones. One never senses in connection with this argument any inclination to question whether the enemy will want to do so, an issue that would surely predominate over the question of his capacity to discriminate.

From that and various associated arguments, one may construct a model of the firebreak idea as conceived by its more enthusiastic proponents that seems usually to include at least the following assumptions:

(a) Inasmuch as the distinction between nuclear and nonnuclear weapons provides the only feasible firebreak in the area between outbreak of limited local hostilities and general war, both sides, insofar as it lies within their capabilities, will most likely not hesitate to outbid each other in violence up to that limit;

(b) Having reached that limit, both will be more or less equally grateful for its existence, and thus unready to consider further escalation;

(c) To attempt to place that kind of firebreak at a relatively low place in the scale of operations would subject it to an insupportable pressure such as would be missing -- or which it could far better sustain -- at high levels.

Obviously, this is not the kind of formulation that will be explicitly acknowledged or even accepted by the firebreak proponents. Yet it is hard to read anything else in an argument that relies so heavily on a mechanical barrier to prevent unwanted escalation rather than on the wills or fears of the respective opponents, and that seems to place more faith on being able to avoid nuclear fighting

if the tolerated magnitude of conventional fighting is permitted to reach high levels rather than being confined to low ones. On the latter point especially, one can easily think of good reasons for suspecting the opposite.

It should also be noted that it is certainly a requirement for the feasibility of any firebreak notion, especially one that envisages placing the barrier at a high level of tactical operations, that the opponent should believe in it about as much as we do. Otherwise the environment for conventional fighting would simply be too precarious. For that reason advocacy of the firebreak idea entails not simply an expectation that the opponent cannot be prevented from overhearing one's arguments to friends and allies in favor of it. It entails rather the keen desire, whether wholly conscious or not, that he should overhear and be swayed by those arguments.

It is on the other hand hardly possible to doubt that the apparent rejection thus far of the firebreak idea by Soviet military theorists has worked markedly to the advantage of the United States.²⁴ It would otherwise be difficult to explain why the Russians yielded so quickly and completely in the Cuban crisis of October 1962. They obviously feared to let a situation develop where one of our destroyers might so much as send a shot over the bows of one of their merchant ships. They clearly wanted no

²⁴ This point is indirectly confirmed by the firebreak proponents themselves, who often advance as a primary reason for building up conventional forces in Europe the possibility that the Russians might attack westward with nonnuclear forces; this they would presumably fear to do if they had to use nuclear forces, or if they continued to hold the belief that any fighting between them and us would quickly go nuclear.

fighting at all, apparently because they felt that any fighting was extremely dangerous. They were no doubt shrewder under the circumstances to act as they did, considering especially President Kennedy's manifest resolution, but had they shared some current American ideas they might have been willing to let things get a good deal stickier before deciding to retreat.

It would similarly be hard to understand why the development of the Cuban crisis resulted in an immediate amelioration in the tension over Berlin, with the Russians behaving themselves much better during and for a long time after the event than before. Clearly the Russians enjoy local conventional superiority in and around the Berlin area, but they seemed not at all ready to test their local ascendancy on that basis. M. Raymond Aron, the distinguished French writer on political affairs, has several times pointed out that the United States and the Soviet Union each seems to favor strategic ideas more appropriate to the forces of the other, and that it is a great advantage to the West that the Russians seem unready to accept those special strategic ideas that are so popular in the United States.²⁵

Naturally, there is no intention here of criticizing either the motives or the logical consistency of those who would induce the Russians (and Chinese) fully to accept the firebreak conception. On the contrary, it represents simply an honest conflict of goals and a reasonable (though

²⁵ See, for example, his The Great Debate (trans. from Le Grand Débat), New York, 1965, pp. 152-154.

I think incorrect) weighing of relative risk. The firebreak proponents seem to feel that the present anti-firebreak Soviet attitude may help deterrence but is much more dangerous to us if deterrence fails. For that reason they want to speed up Soviet acceptance of the idea, which they regard as anyway inevitable. One might in passing notice in this reasoning the interesting differentiation between what are alleged to be deterrence interests and what are alleged to be war-fighting interests.

One might also observe in passing that the Peking decision to intervene in the Korean War followed five months of watching us fight, sometimes desperately, without nuclear weapons -- a fact which could be relevant. The relevance is not really determined by whether or not the Chinese seriously underestimated the power of nuclear weapons, which very likely they did, because our use of them might have served to disabuse them of their depreciating notions.²⁶

The issues just posed relate also to the more general question whether in the net it is in the American interest to promote among our allies and neutrals existing distinctions between nuclear and nonnuclear weapons or whether we should seek to soften those distinctions. Clearly, people representing the U.S. government have in recent years gone quite far in promoting the distinction. Much of this policy has been intended to induce our European allies to build up their conventional forces, in which respect our arguments

²⁶ See Allen S. Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War, The RAND Corporation, R-356, pp. 134-136. (Also published by The MacMillan Co., 1960.)

have quite simply failed. The failure is no doubt regrettable. In any case we cannot avoid debating on its merit a question as important as this one. Still, we may in the future find it embarrassing to have a British or other allied prime minister visit us again on a mission similar to that of Mr. Atlee in 1951.

As it happens, at this writing there has been a good deal of bluster on the part of Communist China concerning our current limited intervention in South Vietnam and especially our several bombing raids against North Vietnam. This bluster, publicly but somewhat halfheartedly supported by the Soviet Union, has included threats of Chinese intervention and scornful references to the "lessons" we apparently failed to learn from our Korean experience. It is not relevant here to attempt to appraise the seriousness of these threats or their effect upon our government and our allies, but what is relevant and notable is the amazing degree to which, on both sides, nuclear weapons seem to be abstracted out of the situation. This event is not enough in itself to compromise our policy -- neutralizing the atom may indeed have a payoff worth the cost -- but the fact that there is a cost should be noted.

XI. PREDICTING THE PROBABILITIES OF ESCALATION: SOME SAMPLE CASES

We must now consider the implications of the foregoing observations for our central subject: the problem of predicting the probabilities of uncontrolled escalation -- or the dangers attending deliberate escalation -- in the event of the outbreak of hostilities between either of the major Communist powers and the United States. We shall continue, however, to consider mainly the special case of Europe.

If the foregoing analysis is in essence reasonably correct, it should be clear that at least in Europe, wherever deterrence-of-war objectives diverge from either war-fighting or anti-escalation objectives, as they inevitably do in important ways, it would be seriously wrong to sell the former short. The appreciation that Europe is in all the important relevant respects entirely different from pre-1914 Europe, an appreciation which seems much rarer in the United States than among historically-minded Europeans, justifies a kind of "going for broke" on deterrence that would have been irresponsible in an earlier age.

Actually, that is exactly the aim which the United States is pursuing on the strategic level. We have gone to great expense to build up a powerful and low-vulnerability strategic bombing system, the success of which will be measured chiefly by whether or not it is ever challenged. The dominant persuasion today among defense specialists is that it faces little danger, at least in the near-term, of being challenged.

Nevertheless, it is possible to imagine deterrence failing in Europe, and we therefore have to consider what to do militarily if it does. The first point to make, and to stress, is that it is impossible to consider intelligently what to do if deterrence fails without at the same time considering how and under what circumstances it will have failed. This must be done in terms not so much of the physical events themselves as of the context of desires, aspirations, fears, and threats between the parties. It should be obvious that Soviet behavior with respect to escalation will be affected one way if the Soviet Union is reacting to a military initiative on our part, especially one that it considers a dangerous threat to its very life, and quite another way if it sees us responding forcefully to its own aggressive moves at relatively detached places like Berlin or Cuba.

To be sure, even in the latter case the aggressor may, in theory at least, be willing to take substantial risks to accomplish his ends. To be capable of some disturbing act, some infringement on the status quo, means at least to be other than wholly wedded to the bliss of peace and quiet. This attitude may already sharply distinguish the aggressor from his opponent. However, it is also possible that the initiator of the disturbance may have calculated that he faces no real risk of harm or loss, in which case the only real courage he is demonstrating by his act is the courage of a conviction that denies the existence of danger. He may expect the opponent to yield, or to compromise, or at the very minimum to go to some lengths to leave him an easy out. He may in fact be so firm in his conviction of the softness of the opponent.

that an initial act of resistance will not be enough to shake him; he will ascribe it to bluff. Nevertheless, such an aggressor is clearly not prepared to go very far in pursuing his object. The conviction that he can have something for nothing is inherently brittle and bound (or at least very likely) to collapse quickly in the face of real determination.

Let us now imagine, as an example, the Russians firing at an American convoy which, after having been halted on the Berlin autobahn, has been ordered by its commander (acting upon higher orders) to continue on its way without awaiting permission. Or one could picture a similar case where the Russians put up a roadblock on the autobahn that American forces then proceed to destroy or to push out of their way.²⁷

If we assume -- as we are bound to for most comparable cases in view of our present knowledge of the Soviet leaders -- that they are anxious to avoid any war with us and certainly don't want one over Berlin, we can understand the Russians being most unwilling to let this situation escalate. For this assumption carries also the corollary assumption that they will be not merely unwilling to persist but positively anxious to retreat if their probe provokes a suitably hostile response from us.

²⁷ There have indeed been incidents where Soviet guards went as far as uncovering their guns when American convoy commanders announced they were going to proceed despite withheld permission, but when the declared deadline arrived the Soviet commander in fact waved through the convoy. One such incident, of October 10, 1963, is described in Horst Mendershausen, A View of U.S.-European Relations in 1964, The RAND Corporation, RM-4334-PR, November 1964, pp. 7f.

Let us now make the added assumption that the issue over which the Soviets have stopped our convoy was an important one in which they feel themselves to be clearly in the right (e.g., we have made a specific agreement with them over access rights which they feel we are now violating; or, more likely, we have previously let some of our prerogatives go to the Russians by default, but we are now trying to recapture some of them), and let us assume also that we have a considerably more stubborn and more confident man (concerning Soviet chances of prevailing) in control in the Soviet Union than either Khrushchev or his successors have thus far proved to be. Now we have a stickier situation to consider. The Soviet leaders are still anxious to avoid any real war with us, but they are not necessarily willing to retreat from their position the very moment some shots are exchanged. Let us assume further that both sides rush in such reinforcements as are locally available. Now we have a representative initiation of the so-called "inadvertent war," the kind nobody wants but which nevertheless breaks out.

But what has broken out and how far has it gone? Both sides, we can imagine further, have remained in diplomatic contact (perhaps with "hot line" intact) or, if conceivably we must think of diplomatic relations having been ruptured before the circumstances above described, some substitute communications have been quickly developed. For the United States it would make a great deal of difference whether the Soviet action seemed to be designed to push us out of West Berlin or had a considerably lesser objective. The former issue is not negotiable, but others might be. If it remains our basic assumption that the

Russians will not accept war over Berlin, we must make the corollary assumption that they are not ready to push us out. However, our leaders may not know that. One of the questions we should be prepared to examine is, How much can U.S. political leaders be in doubt or in gross error about Soviet basic intentions? One merit of negotiations, incidentally, is that while they often fail to bring about a satisfactory agreement, they do sometimes help to clarify for each party what the other really wants -- though it is often possible to know that quite well without negotiations.

The main question we are concerned with is the following: What are the circumstances that can really make such a situation as the one described above go out of control? It would seem that these circumstances boil down basically to two categories of factors, with various conceivable permutations and combinations among them. One of these is the prevalence of rigid mechanisms of military response, such as do tend to pervade war-initiation concepts and also to get written into war plans. The other embraces that bundle of psychological factors summed up by (a) concern with loss of face and (b) tendencies to yield to feelings of hatred and rage.

The "rigid mechanisms" category is reflected in various common expressions about "pushing the button" or "the balloon going up." An interesting and possibly alarming aspect of the Cuban crisis of 1962 was the degree to which the crisis stimulated even among American administration leaders a tendency to think or at least to talk in such simplistic but absolute terms, despite the sophistication they had presumably been accumulating in the preceding

months concerning the appropriateness of flexible response and the feasibility of limited operations. One has to be ready, it appears, for a kind of crisis-induced regression to older patterns of thinking about war and peace.

However, several things must be said on the other side. First, the fear of precisely such semi-automatic escalatory reactions on the part of the opponent acts as a powerful deterrent to both sides. Perhaps the degree of fear will be somewhat asymmetrical (which is not to say that it will likely be greater on our side). However, the present intensity of such fears among all the major powers suggests that the asymmetries are likely to be marginal and to be dominated by the circumstances of the occasion.

We are here dealing again with one of the ways in which the world, and especially that part of it which is Europe, is today strikingly different from what it was before 1914 or even 1939. We have been moving towards much higher levels of tolerance for types of behavior that previously would have been considered impossibly offensive, including limited acts of violence, which we are much readier to distinguish from acts of war. Also, all sorts of precautions and devices are being ground into the relevant systems -- certainly on our side, and there is little doubt on the Soviet side as well -- to keep military reactions from escalating spontaneously. It is a fair surmise, therefore, that the fears to which we have referred are counterescalatory at lower levels of violence, and that the levels at which automatic or spontaneous escalation may tend to take over are being pushed critically higher.

The other group of factors that we have referred to as possibly tending to stimulate uncontrolled escalation are the psychological ones, which, as we have seen, break down into two main sub-categories: (a) concern with saving face and (b) yielding to emotions like rage or fear.

An imputed preoccupation with saving face is probably the greatest single reason why most people so readily assume that resort to nuclear weapons must make for spontaneous escalation. We are all familiar with the normal human tendency to resist or rebel against letting the other fellow "get away with it," where "it" involves any deliberate blow or damage to our position or self-esteem. Also, among nations as among people but usually more so, the word "prestige" covers a number of considerations ranging from mere vainglory to values of serious political moment. Damage to a nation's prestige can be a real injury in the sense that such damage may impose a cost on that nation -- conceivably heavy and payable at some future time. This is especially true of military prestige, in which is bound up the image that other nations may have of one's willingness as well as ability to fight, and one's resolution to fight effectively, in various appropriate circumstances. One could easily give numerous examples of the reality of this consideration, historical and contemporary, but it should be hardly necessary to do so.

However, this is not the whole story. Nations are loath to suffer blows to their military prestige; yet they will at times suffer them in preference to suffering something worse. It is a question of imminent danger, pain, or penalty weighed (though not necessarily, or even

usually, with cool and detached calculation) against possible future costs. The Soviet Union backed down in Cuba in October 1962, and the United States to a considerable degree backed down in Korea in 1951-52, when it quite clearly modified its objectives as a result of Chinese intervention.

One of the most often repeated but nevertheless inane and historically unwarranted axioms about the behavior of nations in wartime is the familiar one that begins: "When one side finds itself losing, [etc.]" The idea is that then all stops are pulled -- nothing is worse than defeat. The axiom used to be used to explain why war could not be kept limited under any circumstances, more recently to explain why it was hopeless to expect a nation to refrain from using nuclear weapons in its possession when under extreme pressure on the battlefield. Well, one instance does not tell very much, but the United States refrained from using nuclear weapons while undergoing at the Yalu one of the worst defeats in its history, and that at a time when it enjoyed for all practical purposes a monopoly on such weapons.

Concern with saving face is what each side tends primarily to attribute to the other. As Leites first pointed out a dozen years ago, Communists have strongly inculcated themselves to be ready to retreat when necessary without worrying about humiliation, except where the pretense of being greatly concerned is a useful tactical maneuver to impress the other side. Naturally, this precept, like most other precepts, is not likely to prevail in full or to remain unchanged -- we are dealing after all with human beings -- but one of the amazing

demonstrations of the Cuban crisis was the degree to which Khrushchev seemed to be following the classic Bolshevik precept that if one has to retreat one must reject any concern with a notion so puerile and so unworthy a professional revolutionary as humiliation. Khrushchev could probably have done much to conceal or minimize his humiliation -- President Kennedy seemed quite ready to assist him in doing so -- but the Soviet leader appeared to be little if at all interested in that objective; at least he seemed unwilling to take any risks at all in order to pursue it.

We can also say of humiliation what we can say of reactions of rage -- that governments, even Communist dictatorships, tend today to be corporate entities in which the emotional feelings of individuals, regardless of how highly placed, are likely to be moderated and contained by the counsels of their advisers. The Hitler regime was different and exceptional in this respect, though even Hitler, despite being much given to rages, seems rarely if ever to have made a really important political or strategic decision under the influence predominantly of that emotion. Where his decisions were irrational, they were so for reasons other than his fits of temper or rage.

Let us now imagine that a conflict has broken out involving American access to Berlin, and, with neither side willing to yield to the other, reinforcements have been run in by both sides and local fighting has intensified. We should notice again the point that we have already alluded to -- that one of the great drawbacks of following the so-called firebreak theory is that the more

that confidence is built up in the firebreak, the less is each side restrained from committing larger and larger conventional forces within the limits of its capabilities. In other words, the effect is to stimulate escalation on the conventional side of the barrier, though fortunately, the location of that barrier is bound to be ill-defined.

Let us make now the quite realistic assumption that the above-described fighting takes place in a context in which the NATO partners have not succeeded in building up their conventional forces on the European central front to parity with the Russians. The Americans and their NATO allies now find themselves outnumbered on the ground, and the Russians, whose initiation of the action was probably without any clear desire to expel us from Berlin, now begin to feel that it has perhaps become possible for them to do so. The Americans, sensing this, decide to threaten the use of nuclear weapons. Perhaps the threat is, or promises to be, ineffective, and the U.S. government decides to use two or three substantial weapons as a demonstration of resolve -- though with the understanding that the best way to demonstrate resolve is to use any nuclear bombs detonated with the highest possible degree of military effectiveness. What is the likely Soviet response?

The common tendency in referring glibly to the "escalatory effect of nuclear weapons" is to assume that "Red" reacts to "Blue's" move by making the same kind of demonstrations, only with larger weapons and more of them. In the real world, however, we should have to ask with what misgivings and in fact utter dismay would the Russians now be contemplating such an act. To repeat, we

are trying to describe a situation in which both sides have been anxious to avoid hostilities and both certainly fear nuclear war. The Soviet Union is conscious that the existing dangerous situation has resulted from its own initiative, but it has been willing to barge ahead so long as (a) the fighting was still limited to conventional arms, in which it was not likely to suffer great damage, and (b) it could retreat from excessive danger in good time. How does it now resolve the question of how to respond to the opponent's resort to nuclear weapons?

We have in the present example deliberately left unclear the issue of responsibility for the outbreak of the fighting, but the Soviet Union nevertheless remains aware that it is over an issue having to do with allied access to Berlin, and not with something that deeply threatens her. Still, let us imagine that the Soviet leaders persist.

Perhaps they do feel it imperative for prestige reasons to make some semblance of a reply in kind, but if they decide to do so it will very likely be mostly because they still expect that the NATO powers will back down. Anyway, such a decision is immeasurably more likely to be the result of deliberate calculation, perhaps based on clear perception and good information and perhaps not, than of a compulsive urge to save face or vent their spleen. In any case, unless the Russians have what they must consider incontestable indication that we will yield first, they are acting with a kind of recklessness that they have not hitherto displayed in real life. Perhaps we too are acting with a courage unusual for us, but the question we are putting to ourselves is: What

happens if we do so act?

It remains to be observed also that the situation above described has not by any means reached a cataclysmic stage, where everything goes up if the Russians decide to test us a little further. On the other hand, the whole situation now appears markedly incompatible with our initial surmise (or stipulation) -- that the Russians do not wish to be engaged in real fighting for the sake of getting us out of Berlin.

Let us therefore now alter our basic assumption and assert that the Russians might be willing to accept a limited war in Europe, even if there is risk or actual use of some nuclear weapons, for the sake of achieving its political objectives, because (a really necessary proviso) it is quite confident that we will not push the issue to general war. This is a bold assertion, but we are now describing a kind of situation that is actually implied or posited when one talks about a possible large Russian attack against the NATO line on the central front. The questions we must ask at this point are: (a) Is it possible for us to keep the ensuing fighting conventional? and (b) Is it desirable for us to do so or to attempt to do so? We are assuming the Russians are bent on aggression, and can bring themselves to accept the detonation of a score of nuclear weapons, perhaps even considerably more.

We should notice that if we are to be at all consistent with our previous assumptions, we have to assume also a good chance that even if we do not use nuclear weapons but somehow manage to resist effectively, the Russians will themselves introduce nuclear weapons. Our

basic assumption, after all, is that they have accepted the risks entailed in large-scale aggression, which must include in their minds the risk that we will use nuclear weapons. How can they exclude that risk? If, nevertheless, with battle joined, they now see us signalling by our restraint our desperate desire to avoid the use of such weapons, they are open to some new ideas. From this demonstration they might well deduce that we must be markedly less prepared than they to withstand nuclear weapons.

Perhaps they will not make that deduction; but how can we then assume that they will be more willing to accept defeat in a battle that has remained conventional than in one that has gone nuclear? Is it not a compelling surmise that it must be just the other way around? Thus it would seem that under the admittedly unrealistic premises we have set for ourselves (in terms of Russian readiness for nuclear risk-taking) the best way, perhaps the only way, for us to avert not only defeat but unnecessary escalation is to demonstrate that our readiness to take risks is not less than theirs. How can we do that except by using the weapons rather more abruptly than the Russians seem to have bargained for?

Another and final notion that we will here consider, not because it makes a great deal of sense but because it is frequently encountered, is that the Russians might launch a deliberate large-scale aggression against us without planning to use nuclear weapons or wishing to do so but prepared to retaliate in kind and to at least comparable degree if we use them. This idea thus assumes that the Russians will, according to the old code of the

duel, blithely leave to us the "choice of weapons" while remaining committed to fighting either way! However, we do permit the assumption that they strongly expect that we will not use them.

Certainly under any circumstances remotely like those existing today, this example assumes "adventurism" of really fantastic proportions, totally out of line with any behavior of theirs that we have witnessed in the past. Nevertheless, let us try to think the situation through a little further. How do we cope in advance with the conceivability of such an attack?

One answer often heard is that we must anticipate it by building up our conventional forces, thus deterring the enemy from starting his fight. But the premise is essential to this argument that the opponent is either (a) prepared to fight even with nuclear weapons or (b) is utterly convinced that we will not under any circumstances use them. Otherwise, he will certainly not let himself be provoked into attacking our forces with their large nuclear capabilities. Now if he is prepared to fight with nuclear weapons, but observes from our costly efforts to build up to conventional parity with him in Europe that we are deeply unwilling to see them used, his cue, as we have already noted, is to threaten their use or actually to introduce a few. But if one insists that he will not do so, in other words that the portion (a) of the premise above does not apply, why should we permit or even encourage the conviction described under the portion (b)? What has our conventional buildup bought us except the encouragement of that conviction?

We have to remind ourselves once more that we have in these speculations deliberately bestowed upon the Soviet

leaders a far, far greater capacity for aggression than they have yet shown evidence of. We have also left completely open the question whether our own leaders could marshal the necessary psychological resources to introduce the use of nuclear weapons and to outbid any Soviet use. Perhaps that will not be true in the real world in the future. But it is one thing to say we could not, and quite another to say we should not. Nor should we confuse the issue by arguing that we should not because we could not. It would at this stage in time be a hazardous assertion indeed to say that in the event of major Soviet aggression against our forces in Europe we could not bring ourselves to use tactical nuclear weapons.

Anyway, if we could not, we would be in a bad way for defending Europe against Soviet aggression (if the Soviet Union were really that aggressive). We certainly could not solve the problem by securing from our allies and contributing ourselves to a buildup to conventional parity with the Russians. To build up conventional forces because we feel we dare not use nuclear forces even against a major attack is only to underline and to signal our weakness. True, they may not be alert to that signal because of their own deep and abiding fear of nuclear weapons. If so, good; then they will not attack. One simply has to have it one way or another. We cannot go on assuming a Soviet Union bent on major aggression but afraid of using nuclears!

Our brief speculations have encompassed only cases in which a relatively small number of nuclear weapons are used more or less in demonstrations. Is this a grave weakness of these speculations? Not within the assumptions

or hypotheses suggested, which state simply that both sides share a common determination to avoid going into an exchange that is many, many times more costly than any imaginable political goal could justify. Drop those assumptions and we are inevitably back in the world of massive retaliation.

If we turn now to the Far East we see that the situation is different in certain vital respects. For one thing, we have fought a fairly large war on the Korean peninsula without once using nuclear weapons that were in our possession. We have set a pattern for enemy expectations, as well as for our own. Secretary Dulles's verbal effort to change those expectations never had much strength and is by now largely dissipated.

The Chinese Communists obviously have little nuclear capability now, and will not have any substantial one for a long time to come. In this situation, where the risk of unwanted escalation hardly exists for us, we would likely stay conventional just because the enemy would be quite willing to let us do so. Or perhaps the lands and the peoples there mean less to us in terms of cultural affiliation than do those of Europe, and for this and other reasons we may feel that there is less prestige or other value to be lost from forced retreat in that part of the world than from one in Europe. Perhaps even some romantic (i.e., morbid) spirit of fair play might prevent us from dropping nuclear bombs upon an enemy who does not have many and who therefore must leave the decision for going nuclear entirely up to us. Also, we are restrained by the firebreak idea, which permits few if any distinctions between regions of the world. What undermines it in one

place admittedly undermines it everywhere.

It is therefore quite possible that we could fight another war in the Far East as large as the Korean War without using nuclear weapons, assuming the American people permitted the government to engage again in such a war. Probably we would even prevail on that basis, as we did militarily in the previous Korean War (only to discard our advantages upon entering negotiations by halting the then ongoing offensive that was succeeding so brilliantly and that was our major leverage upon the opponent).²⁸ But surely it would be going about the job in the hard way, especially since timely indication of readiness to use nuclear weapons is bound to have an enormous even if not utterly guaranteed deterrent power.

It would probably also have repercussions for the future that would in the net not be to our liking. If the Chinese should manage to fight two wars with us during the first three or four decades of the nuclear age without suffering exposure to a single nuclear weapon, we will have fixed for them a pattern which they have every further incentive to exploit.

The gigantic nuclear capabilities of the United States have already been appreciably cut down in their effectiveness for deterring aggression by what might be called established world opinion opposed to their use. To a large extent this has been inevitable and, because it was right to dissociate ourselves from the "just another weapon" philosophy, even desirable. Perhaps too it is a necessary part of the price we pay for attempting to

²⁸ See my R-335, op. cit., p. 318.

restrain nuclear proliferation. But it behooves us to examine much more carefully than we have thus far some of the main propositions and arguments commonly made in support of our own drive to advance even further toward what is in effect the psychological self-neutralization of our nuclear capabilities.

We have in the above exercise examined particularly those arguments which attach great weight to the alleged escalatory potential of any and all uses or threats of use of nuclear weapons. Although our speculations have been as yet too lean and circumscribed to serve in themselves as a basis for major policy recommendations, they have perhaps registered the fact that some of the arguments upon which major policy recommendations have previously been based are extraordinarily vulnerable to systematic analysis. They may also have helped to point out the directions in which it is both feasible and desirable to pursue additional relevant knowledge.

If it be charged that we have not really faced up to the awful risks inherent in miscalculation, or in the tendency to madness that sometimes seems to go with resort to violence, the answer can only be that risks are something we have to measure as best we can. The above essay is an effort to contribute to such measurement. We cannot forfeit the task simply by allowing in advance such gross exaggeration of the risks as to "play it safe." A second look quickly tells us that we do not really add to our safety by doing so.

DOCUMENT CONTROL DATA

1 ORIGINATING ACTIVITY THE RAND CORPORATION		2a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION Unclassified
		2b. GROUP
3 REPORT TITLE ESCALATION AND THE NUCLEAR OPTION		
4 AUTHOR(S) (Last name, first name, initial) Brodie, Bernard		
5 REPORT DATE June 1965	6a. TOTAL NO. OF PAGES 97	6b. NO. OF REFS. -
7 CONTRACT or GRANT NO. AF 49(638)-700	8. ORIGINATOR'S REPORT NO. RM-4544-PR	
9a AVAILABILITY/LIMITATION NOTICES		9b SPONSORING AGENCY United States Air Force Project RAND
10. ABSTRACT A critical discussion of the prevalent consensus that general war can scarcely occur except through escalation from introducing nuclear weapons into lesser conflicts. The Memorandum proposes a systematic examination of this argument by considering special crisis situations in which hostilities might break out, determining at each critical point the real constraints on each side and the various possible options. 97 pp.		11. KEY WORDS Escalation Limited warfare Warfare Strategy Deterrence